

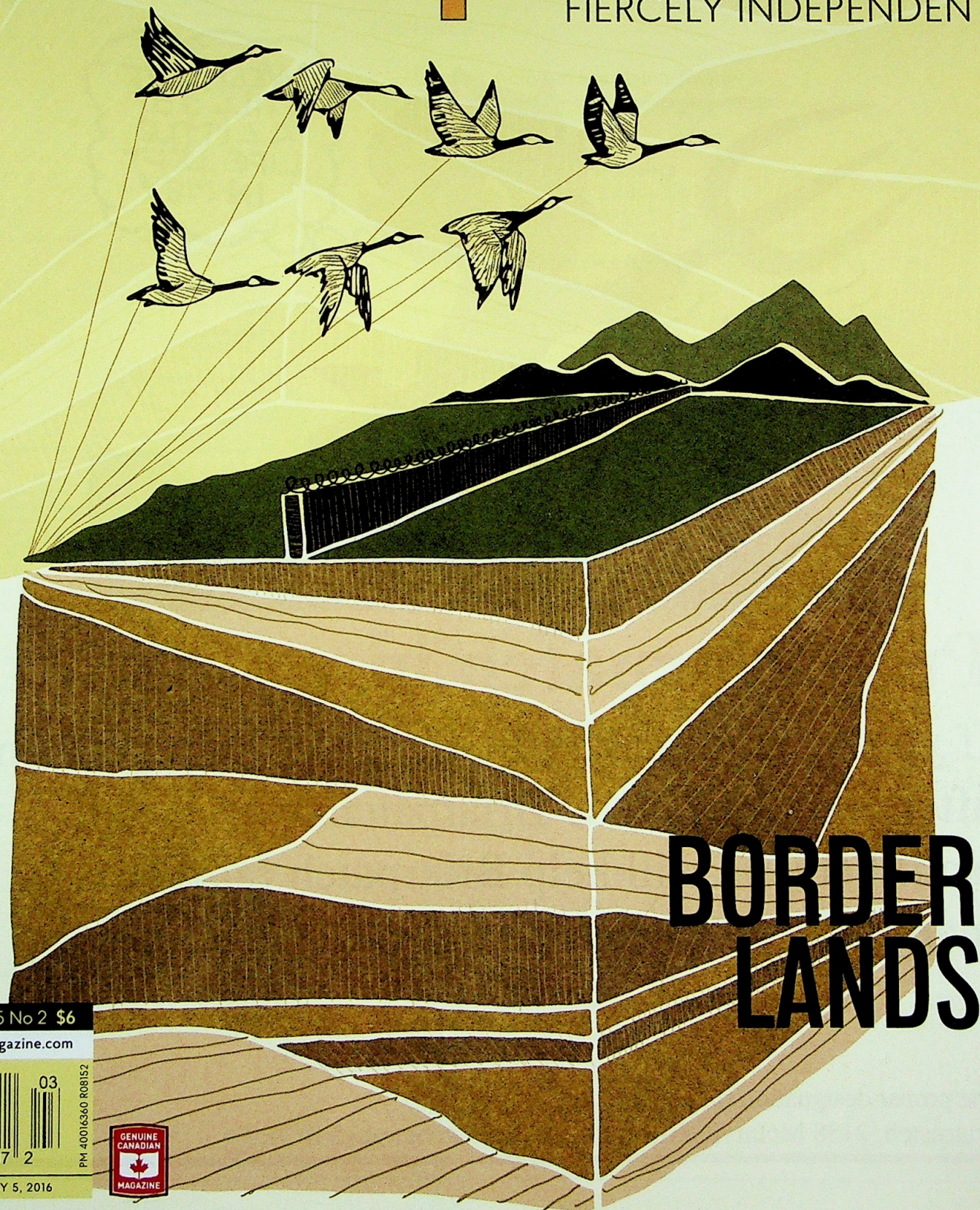
Writing contest winners!

A fierce collective p. 8

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briarpatch

FIERCELY INDEPENDENT



BORDER LANDS

MAR/APR Vol 45 No 2 \$6

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Briarpatch publishes six thought-provoking, fire-breathing, riot-inciting issues a year. Fiercely independent and proudly polemical, Briarpatch delves into today's most pressing issues from a radical, grassroots perspective, aiming always to challenge and inspire its readers.

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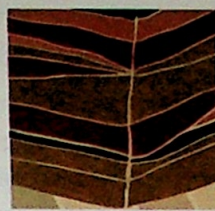
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A Magazine Against Borders

Months ago, we bore witness to staggering news stories about the violent politics of migration: between Sweden calling in its army to manage its "disproportional burden" of refugees, Hungarian prisons overcrowded with Syrian refugees jailed for scaling border fences, and the construction of Slovenian razor-wire fences at the Croatian border, we have observed the militarization and criminalization of movement in full effect.

Meanwhile, on this side of the Atlantic, many in Canada were patting themselves on the back for replacing a blatantly racist prime minister with a nice one who promised resettlement for 25,000 refugees by year's end. Then news came that single young Syrian men would be excluded from entering Canada in order to "deal with security concerns" – code for xenophobic policing of the border. One of the many cheerleaders of this policy of exclusion was Saskatchewan Premier Brad Wall, who conflated youth, masculinity, and brown skin with terror, and successfully pressured the prime minister to hold his horses on the settlement program.

It was flawless timing when, in late 2015, rapper M.I.A. released "Borders." In the first line of the chorus, M.I.A. asks: "Borders, what's up with that?" It's a question that demands we understand the myriad constructs that uphold border systems: policing, patriotism, capitalism, neoliberalism, white supremacy, and empire. M.I.A. flips our collective eyelids to the many ways borders divide collectivities and enact violence on bodies, psyches, and land.

In political science, borders are understood as legally enforced lines dividing territories and people. Drawn up through warfare, theft, and treaties, borders determine divisions between "us" and "them." But the ways in which people experience borders, and are disciplined by them, are much more blurry than this detached political science definition might have us believe.

There are two central concepts in critiques of borders. The first is what Harsha Walia and others have called *border imperialism*: "the entrenchment and re-entrenchment of controls against migrants, who are displaced as a result of the violence of capitalism and empire, and subsequently forced into precarious labor as a result of state illegalization and systemic social hierarchies."

The second concept is *global apartheid*, which Jenna Loyd, Matt Mitchelson, and Andrew Burrige, editors of *Beyond Walls and Cages: Prisons, Borders, and Global Crisis*, explain as "a condition in which the wealthiest regions of the world erect physical and bureaucratic barriers against the movement of people from poorer regions of the world."

As Gwendolyn Muir demonstrates in this issue's cover story ("The Cost of Managed Migration"), the conditions that lead Guatemalan migrant workers to take work in Canada through the Temporary Foreign Worker Program are linked to the lethal capitalist and colonial expansion of the Canadian-dominated

mining industry in Guatemala. Meanwhile, the Canadian state legalizes precarity and establishes barriers that prevent Guatemalan migrant workers from safely organizing and unionizing in Canada.

Canada has built its wealth on, and continues to profit from, uninterrupted colonial displacement, resource extraction, and legalized labour precarity. Canada is overwhelmingly complicit in border imperialism and global apartheid, and it *requires* both to maintain its power.

This issue of *Briarpatch* spotlights the many forms of borders (territorial, classed, racial, gendered) that organize power. It is titled "Border Lands" to reflect the intricate and oppressive relationships between borders and the land through which they are drawn. An interview with members of the Brown, Black & Fierce collective highlights how art and organizing can push back against white supremacy in a colonial city. Hani al Mouli's photos from a Syrian refugee camp capture the resilience of families and communities that have been displaced by wars fought for capital and empire. Dan Darrah's piece on student activism in Oshawa, and Matt Moir's feature about the class divisions amplified by the privatization of air, food, and water in China bring attention to how borders separate people from full liberation. Michelle Stewart unpacks the problem of off-loading racism onto "bad apples" and invites us to draw connections between people and systems of oppression.

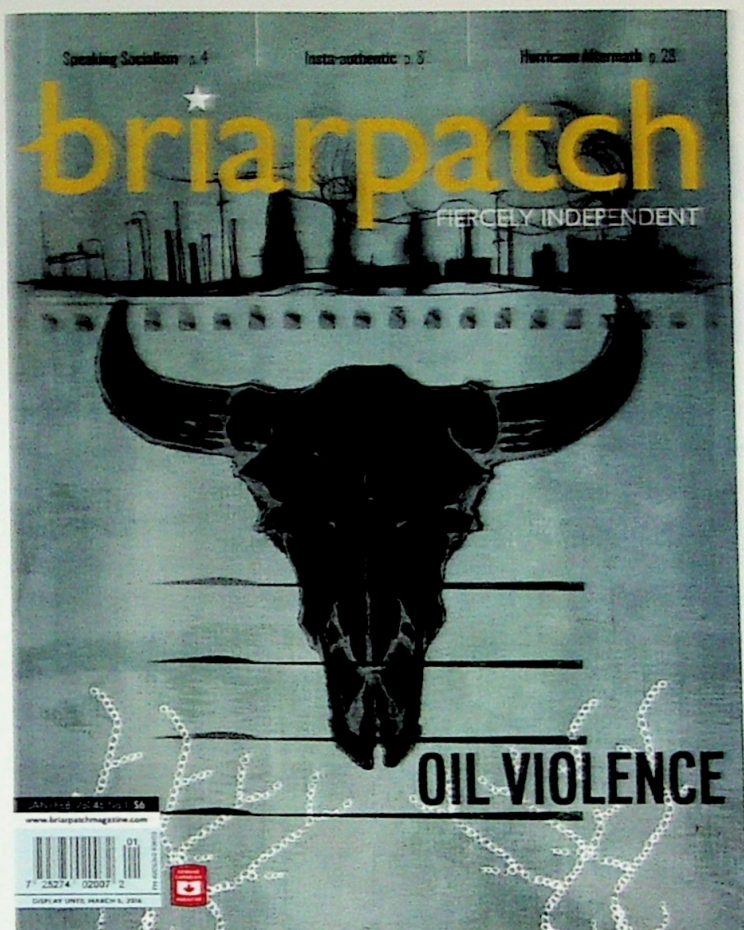
We are thrilled to announce that this issue reveals the winners of our 5th annual Writing in the Margins contest, judged this year by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson and Stephen Collis. The winner of the poetry prize is Laurel Albina, for "Energy Series: Surface Mining," and the winner of the creative non-fiction prize is Siku Allooooloo, for "Living Death." Congratulations to the winners and runners-up of our writing contest, and thank you to all of the writers and poets who submitted their courageous and beautiful work.

This issue reminds us that there is no border – not Canadian, not Schengen, not any – that does not rest on violence, tacit or directly enacted. As always, *Briarpatch* stands with all those who resist borders, division, apartheid, and violence. ★

TANYA ANDRUSIECZKO, EDITOR
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ANNOUNCEMENT

We are now accepting submissions for the annual Andrea Walker Memorial Fund. The fund grants \$400 annually for a feature article, photo essay, or graphic narrative that looks at women's health from a feminist perspective. To apply for this grant, please send a pitch to editor@briarpatchmagazine.com with the subject line "Andrea Walker Memorial Fund." All guidelines are at briarpatchmagazine.com/andreawalker. Deadline for pitches is March 31, 2016.



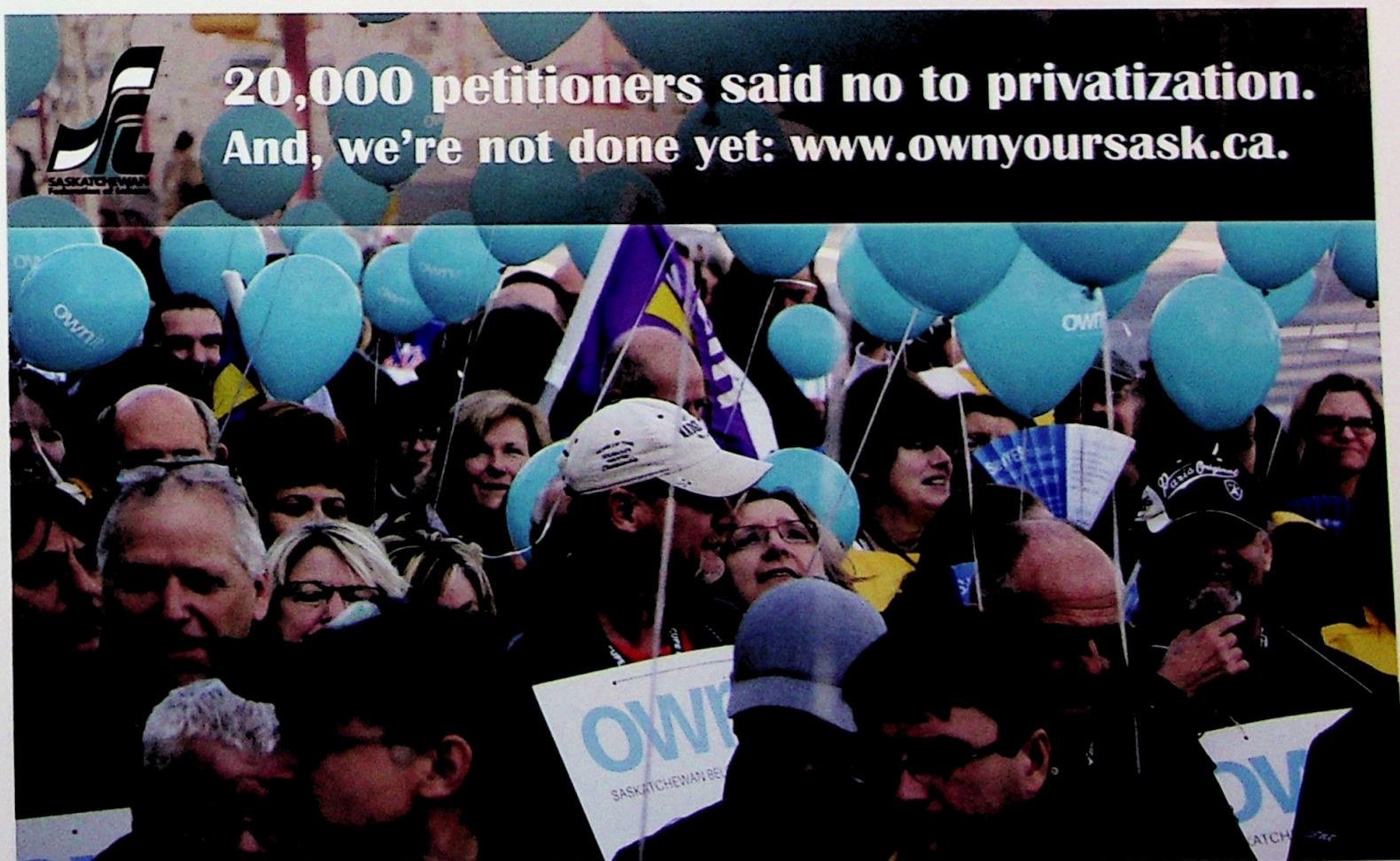
LIVING AUTHENTIC

The article "authentic at all costs" (January/February 2016) in the new issue is fantastic – it really touched a nerve! This comes just after I've discovered a blog dedicated to uncovering the similarities of Kinfolk-inspired Instagram feeds (<http://thekinspiracy.tumblr.com/>) and an article about the hip-settler takeover of Vancouver's rapidly gentrifying Chinatown.

In the past couple of years, retail stores started tacking on "provisions," "sundries," or "supply" to the end of their name. Packaged handmade goods at craft fairs or local shops display the brand name, a web link, and social media logos in lieu of a product description. It also seems the people who participate in this culture are the children of very moneyed Anglo old stock. I could be wrong, but alas, these are the people who are most visible in social media.

Vancouver has a lot of "lifestyle flexing." Whether it's urban-timberman or Mountain Equipment Co-op tech, there's always something to make you feel bad about yourself and think that by buying into their products, you are somehow enriching your own self and your community. The famous phrase "you can ski, golf and sail in one day" promotes an isolated, money-dependent lifestyle, where Vancouver residents feel they need to leave the city in order to be a true citizen.

CHRISTINE NOVOTEL
VANCOUVER, B.C.

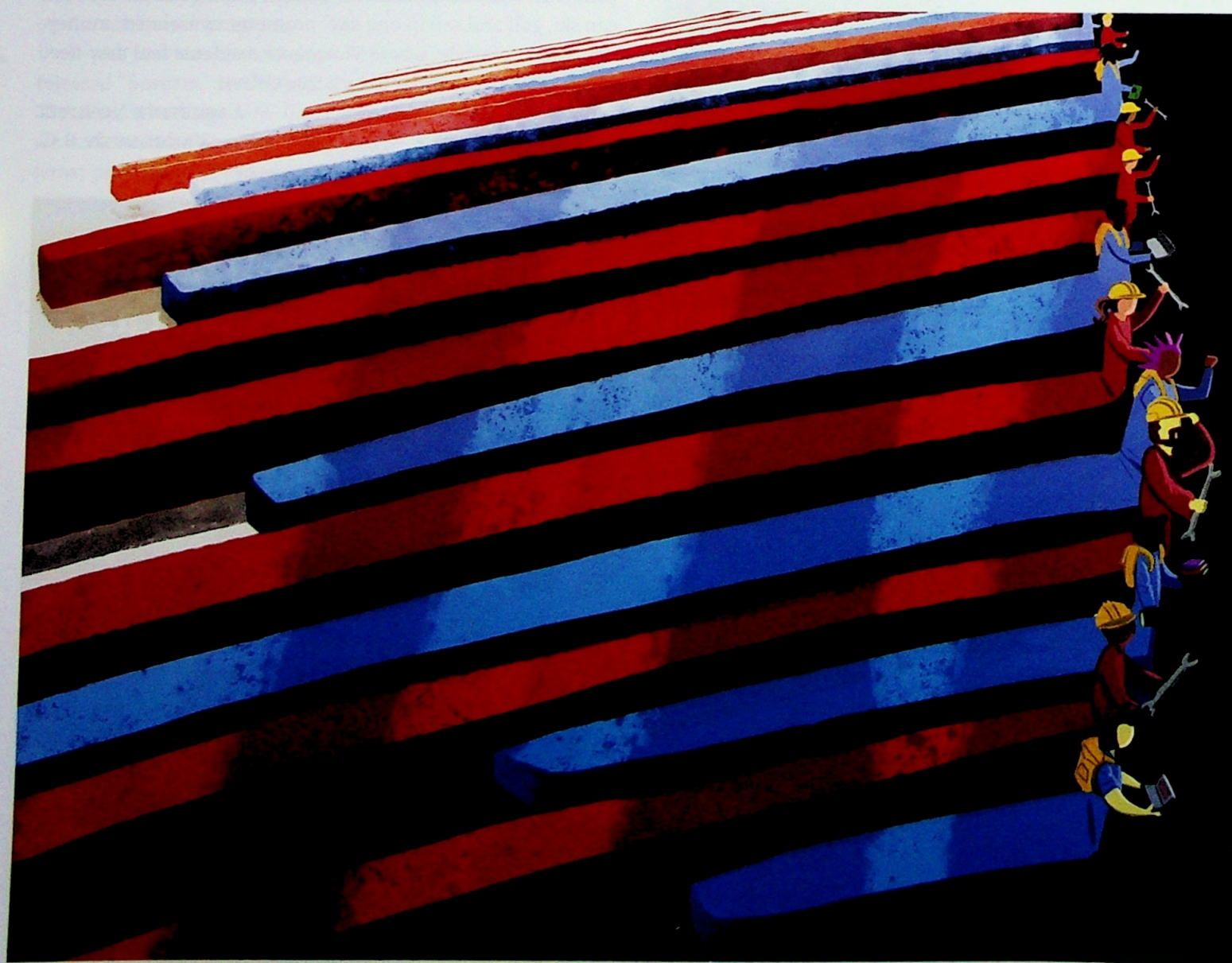


STUDENT ACTIVISM IN A UNION TOWN

*The automotive capital of Canada was once a site of militant labour organizing.
Today, it's humming with a renewed sense of activism, this time led by students.*

By DAN DARRAH

Illustration by DERRICK CHOW



We are by now familiar with the story of the crushed American dream: the expansion of free trade, the attendant outsourcing and capital migration to Mexico, and advances in technological automation combined to pull the rug out from under the feet of the American manufacturing sectors in Detroit, Gary, Youngstown, Buffalo, Flint, and Cleveland. With capitalist bootstraps permanently slouched out of reach in those blue-collar towns, one thing was clear: the economic devastation of the working class was an effect of the forces of globalization, international profiteering, and free trade.

A story not often told in this context is that of Oshawa, a small Canadian city in southern Ontario, 45 minutes outside of Toronto. From the early 1900s, Oshawa was built primarily by the automotive giant General Motors. GM made Oshawa home to some of the largest branch plants in the country, christening the small city as the automotive capital of Canada. A strong labour spirit pervaded the municipality, painting it as a picturesque "union town."

Local 222 – once the United Auto Workers, then Canadian Auto Workers, now Unifor – lived through the rise and fall of Oshawa's manufacturing sector. The union debuted during the 1937 Oshawa strike, which historian Irving Abella once called the "birth of industrial unionism" in Canada. In the following decades, auto workers militantly held wildcat strikes, organized plant occupations, and protested high interest rates in Ottawa. In 2008, union members set up a four-day-long blockade around the now-closed truck factory to protest the forthcoming plant closure and loss of 2,600 jobs. The plant closed, but workers took what solace was available in winning negotiations for buyouts and retirement packages.

Oshawa resembles a miniature version of Detroit – both in its rise and its fall.

In the 1980s, GM's four plants supplied over 20,000 jobs in Oshawa. Today, that number is a meagre 2,600.

Automation breakthroughs in the 1990s severed the workforce, and as the free-trade trend intensified, capital left town. With it disappeared much of the community that had developed.

Since experiencing the drastic decline in automotive jobs, Oshawa's levels of child and adult poverty, inadequate housing, and precarious employment have spiked. Food bank use in Durham Region rose 21 per cent between 2009 and 2010, in line with deep cuts to social assistance. In 2012, 13.8 per cent of adults in Oshawa lived below the poverty line, and the following year, statistics show that almost 20 per cent of the city's children did.

At the centre of these issues is the city's economic transformation – from being secure and rooted in manufacturing to becoming precarious and service or knowledge-sector based.

Despite 2014 being a "banner year" for job creation – with the growth of available jobs at Lakeridge Health and local educational facilities – former manufacturing workers are having difficulties

sector, which has witnessed significant growth in Durham Region.

"New knowledge-based labour markets in the riding have not directly replaced the manufacturing opportunities that previously existed," states the SPNO's *Action on Poverty* report. "The community is facing growth in one sector and decline in another – a situation that is creating conditions of poverty and hardship for many residents."

NEW STUDENT LEADERSHIP

In response to the ongoing precarity, Local 222 recently began organizing service department workers at Mercedes-Benz Durham, cleaners at GDI Services, and support staff working for the nearby student union.

The Durham Region Labour Council (DRLC) also continues to act as a meeting place for the community's broad working class, as it has since 1942. It still holds its general meeting on the second Tuesday of the month in the hall of Local 222, where executive members, activists, students, and workers connect to speak about issues in the community and to organize.

But fresher forces for social justice have

Since experiencing the drastic decline in automotive jobs, child and adult poverty, inadequate housing, and precarious employment have spiked. At the centre of these issues is the city's economic transformation.

filling these knowledge-based vacancies. Asymmetry between skills required for the new kinds of work and the skills honed by the long-standing residents who previously worked on the assembly line is, according to the Social Planning Network of Ontario (SPNO), "forcing residents into precarious employment situations." Many of these precarious situations have emerged in the retail

recently arisen, in the form of student politics. One representative of this shift is Jesse Cullen, a community organizer and the president of the Oshawa-based Student Association (SA) of Durham College and the University of Ontario Institute of Technology.

Before returning to school as a mature student, Cullen had lived in the "slums" of the city on social assistance, which gave

"People's eyes glaze over" in conversations about racism, sexism, and homophobia in the community; support of left-wing labour politics does not, after all, guarantee engagement with other issues of social justice.

him what he calls a "working-class orientation." Blending his own experiences with the critical theories from his criminology studies, he began to get involved in addressing community issues that connected the labour movement with student politics.

The SA has reoriented itself toward social justice, which yielded some criticism after years of conservative administrations, he says.

"There are always some folks who do not believe the Student Association should be involved in activism or left-wing political organizing," he observes. "There is a long-standing culture of collusion between 'student leaders' and the administrations on our campus. And because of the void of effective and combative student leadership, there is a natural backlash against anything that challenges that tradition of passive student leadership. But, that's why we organize. That's why we struggle."

Only recently has the SA become involved in strengthening bonds between the deeply rooted Oshawa labour movement and the student movement, Cullen says. The first campaign between the two was Drop Tuition UOIT, which organized a student walkout last March.

"What [students and labour] have in common is our interest in controlling our own labour, and the fair distribution of wealth and resources in our community. Our staff at the Student Association is also unionized with Unifor Local 222, and we think that relationship is extremely important, too. For example, Local 222

also represents bus drivers with Durham Region Transit [DRT]," he says. "So, when DRT recently announced plans to hike student bus fares by 25 per cent, Unifor Local 222 came out against it. There are many opportunities like that, where our interests intersect and where we can pool our collective resources and influence to make life better for students and workers.

"We definitely look to the history of militant organized labour in Oshawa as a model and a proud tradition," Cullen insists.

BROADER STRUGGLES

But there are difficulties that come with being a predominantly "white working-class town" – the progressive conversations, Cullen notes, "end at wealth

groups that, I think, are less present in the membership of traditional trade unions," he says. "Particularly as young people have less and less access to unionized workplaces, and the demographic of the remaining unionized sections of the Canadian workforce is aging, there exists this tension between protecting what those older, typically white workers have – like pensions and benefits – and broadening the labour movement to include young workers, racialized workers, women, and other folks who don't have access to those kind of workplace benefits and protections."

This tension is not unique to Oshawa. Charlotte Yates, professor emeritus at McMaster University, raises questions about the "strategic change" needed within union structures and organizing tactics given the changing makeup of the labour movement. "Our communities are racially and ethnically diverse and the labour force is changing accordingly. To date, many unions have failed to keep pace with these demographic changes. Unions are therefore in danger of being out of touch with many workers."

These conditions, Yates says, precipitate a need to "overcome a skilled trades

"There's a student perspective on every issue, and trying to find alliances and build strategic relationships in the community is important."

redistribution. People's eyes glaze over" in conversations about racism, sexism, and homophobia in the community; support of left-wing labour politics does not, after all, guarantee engagement with other issues of social justice and equality. Such attitudes can clash with the diverse student populations of UOIT, Trent, and Durham College, Cullen says.

"As a student union, we represent international students, many racialized students, and other equity-seeking

history of exclusivity and domination by Anglo-Saxon members and practices in the face of a rapidly changing ... labour force."

Outside of the local labour movement, the SA has been involved in its share of community struggles. "There's a student perspective on every issue, and trying to find alliances and build strategic relationships with folks in the community [is important]," Cullen affirms.

The Student Association draws links

between the many experiences of marginalization present in Oshawa, and they organize in solidarity with diverse movements and causes, including No One is Illegal, democratic electoral participation, LGBTQ rights, and prisoner rights.

Cullen recognizes that the student population represents a microcosm of Oshawa's broader social struggles. In particular, he notes, "poverty [in Oshawa] is a huge issue for students. There's 21 per cent youth unemployment, we have incredible challenges in access to child care, access to good-paying jobs, and [facing] precarious work."

Such economic shifts and growing poverty have also instigated serious

the agenda is crucial, he says. He's also focusing on inviting those who haven't engaged in such organizing before.

"We're getting out and saying, 'hey, [signing] this petition is one thing – but it's not going to change the world.' We're getting continual engagement that way," he maintains, noting that they're laying the foundation for broader, more intersectional and accountable social change.

We Are Oshawa, an activist group on whose executive board Cullen used to sit, has employed this tactic. The work of WAO is largely canvassing door-to-door between elections to raise awareness of issues like affordable child care and public services; it most recently campaigned for

"We look to the history of militant organized labour in Oshawa as a model and a proud tradition."

housing issues, Cullen says. He slams the political priorities of city council, who, he says, sold off the city's social housing units that were \$3 million behind in repairs while doling out tax breaks and cutting development costs for the builders of a new Holiday Inn.

Cullen also mentions other movements happening in the city. Tenants in Oshawa's poorer south end have begun organizing as the South Oshawa Community Association to address some of their "deplorable" living conditions, Cullen says, like "bed bugs, maintenance issues, and infestations." He says these problems are no longer centralized in urban centres as they traditionally have been and are readily apparent in suburbs like Oshawa.

In addressing these issues, Cullen says the next step for community leaders, students, and organizers is "building capacity" for change in the city through "block-by-block organizing" and "establishing democratic spaces." Having a place for citizens to be heard and to set

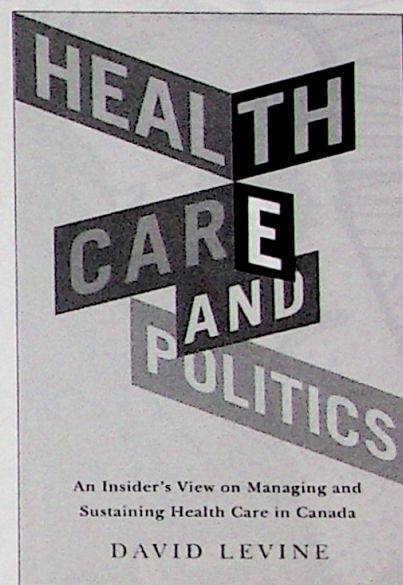
the Save Canada Post campaign, which Oshawa city council ultimately endorsed. Cullen says the same dedication will be needed to "push some of the right-wing politicians" to move on Oshawa's pressing issues.

Despite the current barriers to change, Cullen maintains that he admires Oshawa's "resiliency and working-class character." He remarks, "It's small enough to see people you know every day and know the names of your servers at the local restaurants, but it's large enough that it's 'on the map.'" When Oshawa does something, Cullen says, people notice – and local activism is no different. ★



DAN DARRAH is a freelance journalist and student in Toronto. You can follow him on Twitter at @danxdarrah where he tweets about foreign policy, labour, social justice, and his unflinching support for the Toronto Raptors.

Finding solutions.



HEALTH CARE AND POLITICS *An Insider's View on Managing and Sustaining Health Care in Canada*

David Levine supports, without qualification, a public, universal health care system, but questions the effectiveness of managing the system from the Minister's Office. Decision-making based on politics often means best solutions are not implemented. He analyzes what is not working in the current system, proposes how to fix it, and examines the barriers to implementation.

DAVID LEVINE is Associate Professor in the Faculty of Public Health at the Université de Montréal. He draws on his experience of running many health care institutions including hospitals and ten years as head of the Montreal regional health authority.

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FIERCE EXISTENCE & RESISTANCE

AN INTERVIEW WITH BROWN, BLACK & FIERCE

By BRIARPATCH STAFF

Illustration by LAUREN CRAZYBULL

Portrait by VIC MITTAL

Brown, Black & Fierce is a collective of Indigenous people, Black folks, and people of colour (IBPOC) who are dedicated to centring the experiences and voices of queer, trans, gender non-conforming, and two-spirited people. Located in Amiskwaciwâskahikan (Edmonton), Brown, Black & Fierce works to dismantle white supremacy through activism, art, peer support, and organizing work.

On November 7, 2015, the collective held the inaugural Brown, Black & Fierce Festival organized by and for IBPOC. The festival unpacked issues of immigration and decolonization, and processes of racialization. *Briarpatch* spoke to collective members Alex Felicitas, Ruby Diaz Smith, Leila Sidi, Jenni Roberts, and Aurélie Lesueur, to learn more about their work.

Ruby Diaz Smith has described racialized and queer people as existing in a state of being “small enough, palatable enough, and quiet enough for our own survival.” What is BB&F, and how does it challenge the forces of silencing and oppression inherent in white supremacy?

BB&F: The collective began with two of the members, who barely knew each other at the time, reaching out to say, “I’ve heard you speak of a desire and a need, a craving for space like this. What if we organized something small together?” We never thought it would become anything bigger than a small evening of IBPOC [Indigenous, Black, Person of Colour] performances and conversations. As we put our heads together, though, it became clear how necessary this event [the Brown, Black & Fierce Festival] was, both in our personal lives and for our diasporic communities – including for those displaced on their own lands, on which we are settlers. Half of our collective had never done organizing like this before, and almost all of us had only ever organized in circles of mostly white people. Taking

our own space changed everything. We found we no longer had to keep quiet in meetings; we no longer had to silence our own needs, discomforts, and experiences of violence and oppression from our colleagues. The strength of this realization within our small group extended to how we began to shape all of our interactions with power holders in the community. When applying for funding, we didn’t parse words or try to aim for a neoliberal “middle,” but stood firm in who we were, why we were, and what we were trying to accomplish. It is so much harder to be “fierce” and “unapologetic” as an individual, but working with each other was so validating and real to us.

Monetary considerations have also been a way in which we challenge oppressive systems and white supremacy. We are fully committed to compensating people for their work. For the festival, for example, all facilitators, performers, and other organizers were paid an honorarium. We sourced materials for the workshops. We offered subsidies for those travelling in for the festival, and we held a free meal, prepared by Jenni’s mom, for about 100 people. Too often, women and IBPOC folks are

not compensated for their time and work, so this has been an integral part of our goals – to be able to guarantee an honorarium for each person involved. Well, except for ourselves, but we're working on that! I think it's super-important to note that we're almost entirely self-funded through community support.

At the beginning, we said, "You know what? There's no way we are going to qualify for any funding applications that the city or other organizations might have. It's time we look to our peers, white folks who have

much greater access to wealth and resources, to help us out on this one." It was actually pretty incredible to see so many white folks stepping up consist-

ently and also quietly to provide so much necessary support. From organizing and managing multiple fundraisers, to donating their skills and artwork to silent auctions, or using their positions of power to provide us with free spaces to hold our events, people stepped up to increase the capacity and well-being of us as POC organizers, which was something most of us had never experienced before. We're not handing out cookies here, but we think it's important for white people who want to act as allies to know that there are very concrete and tangible ways to support IBPOC people.

What does "fierce" mean?

BB&F: Fierce means so much: it's something that everyone defines for themselves, and that definition is always flexible, multi-toned, and varied. Our collective members are fierce as individuals in ways we define for ourselves, but we are also fierce as a group in how we make decisions and how we structure our organizing to be independent of white supremacist organizations that gate-keep and hold power over us. Fierce means resistance; for us, it has meant making a deliberate choice around funding, and reaching out to our community first instead of trying to jump through hoops in Edmonton's art scene. It has also been about fiercely supporting, loving, and listening to each other throughout an intense experience of organizing. We are fierce in our breakdowns, in our vulnerability, in our need for care. We are fierce in saying "NO" to those who try to tokenize us within their "multicultural and therefore not racist" agendas. We set out to be welcoming and celebratory of all aspects of people's fierceness, no matter how hard or soft.

How many people are in BB&F, and how does the collective grow?

BBF: At the moment there are five of us who have done the core organizing, but many others have been ever-present along the way, from IBPOC supporters to white allies. Our work is not

"ours" – we simply felt the call and had the energy to step up and act on a need that has long been felt in our communities. After the festival, we had many people approach us to say they wanted to help organize future events; lots of people have also connected hoping to have us partner in some way with their endeavours and groups. The collective will expand, shrink, and become many things as we continue. It's clear by the amount of things we've committed to in the next six months that we're

not planning on stopping anytime soon, but we also hold that we don't wish to act as gatekeepers to POC organizing and events. We don't wish to enact lateral violence by tak-

ing over other IBPOC spaces or endeavours, or monopolizing all of the available resources. That's an important piece for us right now – looking to groups who have long been doing this work but who don't hold the same access to social capital that we do. We're all in our mid-20s to mid-30s and have pretty good access to mainstream resources (language, education, technology, and so on). We're hoping that whichever way the collective grows, it will be organic, not forced, and will remain a nurturing experience for those involved.

You recently put on the Brown, Black & Fierce Festival. What did you want to achieve through it, and what were some of the powerful lessons from it?

BB&F: First and foremost, we wanted a space for IBPOC people who were creators in some way to be able to express themselves freely, independent of the agendas of well-meaning but white-centred organizations and events. We wanted a space that would be safe for those expressions, conversations, and connections to be made. Initially, we gave ourselves about three months to put together a small evening program. Based on responses to our first steps, though, we quickly realized that this would grow into something beyond our initial plan. First and foremost, we wanted it to be a genuine experience for all involved. There were many difficult periods along the way, and certainly the festival itself revealed new and nuanced issues that were huge lessons for us. Namely, we found that there is much work to be done to ensure that those who are light-skinned, white-passing, or even half white are able to find safety and community. There has been so much internalized oppression and a push toward being model minorities that often we perpetuate colonial and lateral violence on our peers.

Ultimately, it became a day-long festival with 17 workshops and just as many performances. Jenni's mom cooked for 100 people, and the following day, two POC healers offered their skills and attention to those in our communities.

Who do you consider to be the audience of the collective's work and activism?

BB&F: We consider the audience to be Indigenous folks, Black folks, and people of colour of all ages, especially those who identify as women, trans, queer, two-spirited, and gender non-conforming. The festival saw many folks from those communities attend workshops and perform; however, it was quickly evident how much more work we need to do to reach out to Métis Indigenous folks, white-passing folks, and racialized newcomers to these territories. For us, this piece is crucial, because without the active participation and direction of these communities, we are re-enacting settler colonialism. When we hear that Métis folks feel they need "markers" to feel accepted in spaces, or that they need to constantly "prove" themselves by having to explain their histories and land base, it means that there is still much more work to be done. White settler colonialism has impacted all of us, and I think it's important to have real discussions about the ways in which that has shaped our identities and experiences. Those are parts of us that can be painful to remember or be reminded of, or to have brought up to us in an accusing or excluding manner by other settler POC folks. Many folks who are light-skinned, half white, or white-passing chose to not participate in the festival due to discomfort around their lightness, or felt that the collective or other participants wouldn't accept them. They are whom we still want to reach the most at this time.

How does your location in an urban space, Amiskwaciwâskahikan (Edmonton), affect your work, fierceness, momentum, and motivation?

BB&F: Amiskwaciwâskahikan is a place where many Indigenous folks and racialized folks experience more outward racism than a lot of places north of the 49th parallel. Confederate flags are a common sight, and let's not forget that the Aryan Guard and the KKK continue to recruit and organize in this city and nearby. This is also a place to which many of our parents have come from other countries to seek safety and more opportunities. And, foundationally, this is the place where Indigenous folks for thousands of years have made their homes and lives.

These histories are not mutually exclusive. But for Indigenous, Black, and racialized communities, it has meant outward attempts of erasure of our languages, our cultures, and displacement from our homelands. We've had to develop thick skins, do a lot of things we haven't wanted to do in order to survive, and have been forced to stay silent. I think we are coming to a time now where things are changing, and we are starting to recognize that this is the moment to rise up. We are ready to talk about truths, and not have to sugar-coat them for others. We are coming to a time now where too many of us have gone missing, or have taken our lives, and we are saying now: "not one more." We are coming to a time where we are no longer apologizing for our existence, and we are asserting our presence and our future. ★



Members of Brown, Black & Fierce. Back row: Leila Sidi, Ruby Diaz Smith. Front Row: Jenni Roberts, Aurélie Lesueur, Alex Felicitas.



Illustration by LEYA TESS ANDERSON

Energy Series

Surface Mining

By LAUREL ALBINA

You lift skin.
 Peel back watered hollows.
 Tear up birds' brush wet land.
 Suck and scrape.

My boreal, my bog, my peat, my muskeg.

You call it overburden.

Spit and chew my fine skin.

But I am compressor of sediment, visor of seabed, mistress of fossil.

I ooze slow
 sink under
 slip sticky black between sand.

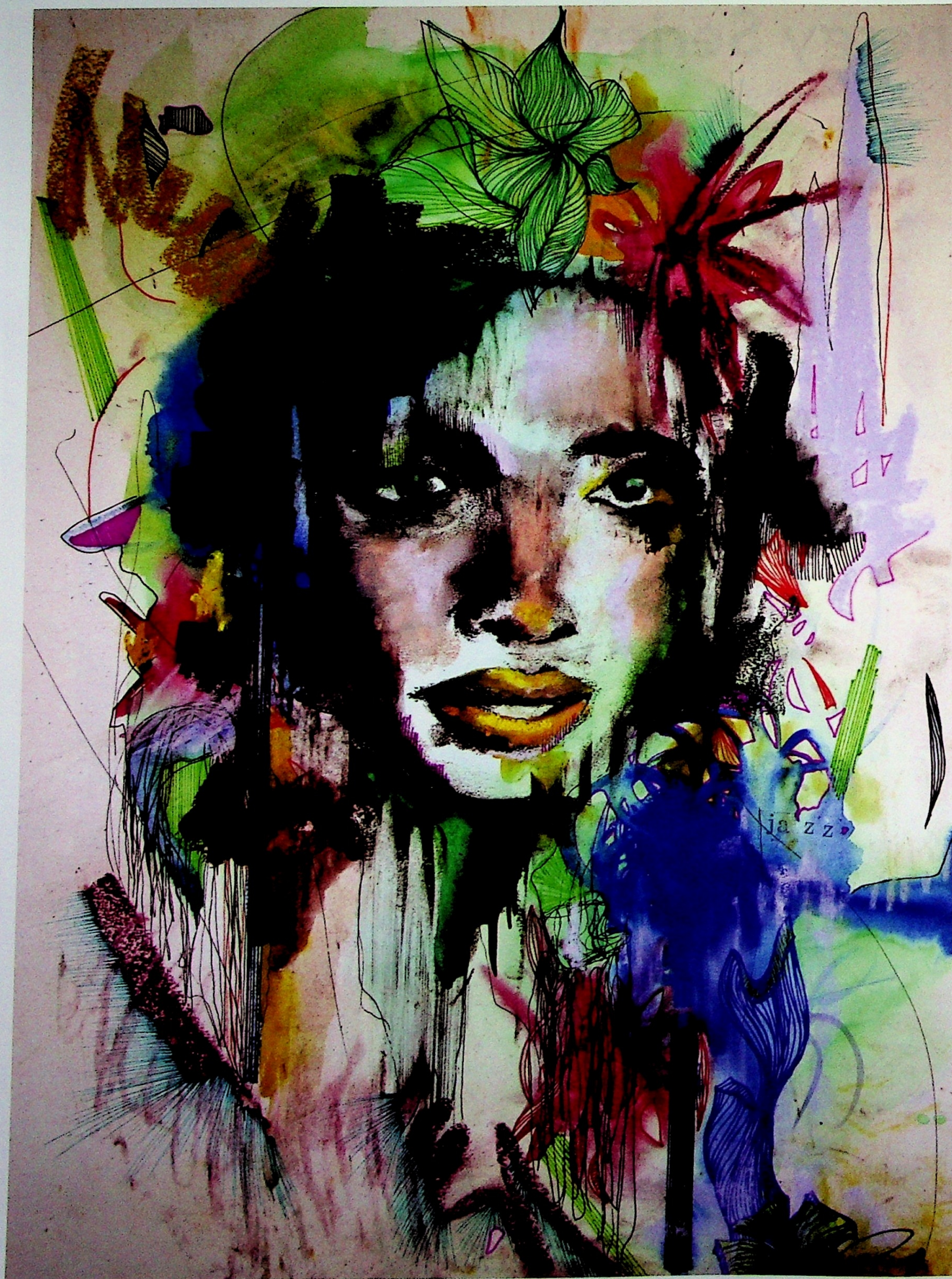
You alchemy
 bitumen into oil barrel.
 Shoot hot water
 cut siphon slush
 slurry my broken matter.
 Trap me
 in tanks and tailing ponds.
 Split me apart. Spit me
 into silver Athabasca.

Bring your big diggers.
 Your mappers, your prodders.
 Your seven-storey shovellers
 your hundred-ton trucks
 your conveyer belts and drums
 your pipes and your lines.

Bring your coffee break to my eon,
 your night shift to my star gaze.
 I boom beyond shifting gears and lit engines.
 I am the night ring in eardrum,
 my voice still beating.



LAUREL ALBINA is a Canadian-born Palestinian-American writer and labour organizer. Her writing is influenced by her parents' emigrations to Canada as a result of conflict and war. She lives in East Vancouver, B.C. with her partner and children.



LIVING DEATH

By SIKU ALLOOLOO

Painting by BRANDI HOFER

Bouquets of flowers line the mantel and hallways. All my loved ones around me, mourning my death. I hear them suffer. I feel them squeeze my arm and kiss my forehead, shaking. Their tears on my skin. I cannot move or speak, but inside I scream, "I'M ALIVE!!!" I want desperately for them to hear me. "Papa, Mama, I'm alive! Do not say goodbye. Please, do not say goodbye!"

The lid lowers and is sealed shut. "Wait! No, no, no...." My casket is lifted and I am carried upon shoulders, carried along a current of procession songs and cries. No. This cannot be real. This must be a dream.

Cold. Dark. Underground. I want to scream and break this door open but I can't lift my body. My stomach seethes with terror, rage, and desperation. I can't quite remember who I am or how I got here. Fragments of disconnected memories stream away from me, like air sucked into a void. Am I breathing? How long have I been here? I am losing my mind. Frantic flashes of brightness take over my vision, jarring flutters of white and black. My body feels like it is rotting. Is this death or have I been forgotten?

 Haitians have many stories of zombies. "Oh yes," my grandfather would say, holding my gaze. "One of our relatives was made into a *zombi*."

He shifts his weight in the chair, crossing a leg over. "It was many years ago, in Jérémie." His ocean eyes look out into a time beyond reach but that spills through his stories and fills the room with its ether. Jérémie is known as the city of poets, and it is the birthplace of both my grandfather and his lineage of impassioned storytellers. His stories are filled with wild characters, magnetism, humour, and wonder. But this one is different. It demands a certain kind of attention and has left a feeling of something unsettled, even decades later and generations removed.

He looks out a long while, remembering a lifetime past. One arm leans on the chair back behind him while the other falls across the table. A faint motion of acknowledgement in his eyes and he is ready to tell the story.

"Her name was Nadège. She was young and very beautiful, and she was engaged to a nice man. An older man had wanted to marry her, maybe a distant acquaintance of her father's. No one knew much about him but that he had a strange darkness ... something hidden behind his eyes. Her father refused politely and never saw him again. People arrived from all over for the wedding, so, a few days in advance, her parents held a big dinner. The house was filled with people, exuberance, and laughter. But,

unbeknownst to them all, someone must have slipped a poison into the bride's drink because the next morning she was found dead in her room. It was devastating. Instead of a wedding, they had a wake. The wedding flowers were still fresh and were used for her funeral. And that was it. I think her fiancé eventually married someone else.

"Several years after the tragedy, some of our cousins were riding horseback in the mountains, weaving along narrow trails, and suddenly they came across her. She was working in a large garden. And there were others there, too. Our cousins called out to her, "Nadège! Nadège!" – but she did not respond. They stayed at a distance for fear of the master and his dark power, but remained there a long while, watching. They said she was vacant, lifeless, unaware of her own name. She stood up to turn and glanced over at them. Stared blankly in their eyes, then went into the house. The cousins returned home and shared what they had seen. It turned out that the property belonged to the strange man, though at the time no one could do anything. They were afraid, you see.

"A powerful substance made from a certain plant or blowfish poison is put into a person's food. The poison is colourless, tasteless, and causes an abrupt death. The heart stops and the victim

becomes paralyzed, unable to breathe – though they are aware of everything. Their senses are alert but they are powerless to communicate. Days after they are buried, the one who gave the poison digs up their grave and summons them to life. They steal the burial belongings or give them away to any helpers. Only, the dead do not fully awaken. Their body is alive but they are without memory or free will. They become zombies – made to live as slaves to the will of their captors.

"The only way to bring them back is to make them eat salt. Salt jogs their memory, returns their spirit. Only salt can make them human again."

Since childhood I have always been both fearful of and captivated by this story – the phenomenon of being stolen away

from oneself, of being alive and dead at the same time. What scared me most was the idea that memory and identity could be hijacked and manipulated.

My mother was Taíno from Haiti, and a lifelong warrior for Indigenous peoples. She raised her children in Northern Canada so we could be close to our Inuit and Dene roots, nourished by our father's people and homelands in ways that were impossible on our Haitian side. My mother's family had fled from oppressive dictatorships in Haiti when she was a girl and couldn't return for three decades. So she raised us with stories instead to fill us with the richness of *Ayiti*: the redness of the earth, the warmth and healing of the sea, the spirit of our people, our history, our folklore. She taught us to hold on to all of who we are and where we come from, to stay close to those sources of vitality and strength.

She also raised us with stories about conquistadores and the unconquerable spirit of ancestors who fought and died for love and freedom. This is how she taught us about the world and connected our feet to the path. She showed us how to meet the

realities of tyranny and colonization straight on, and to fight from the heart.

Taínos were the first Indigenous people to encounter Columbus. Slavery for us began when he noted proudly in his journal that the

They said she was vacant, lifeless, unaware of her own name. She stood up to turn and glanced over at them. Stared blankly in their eyes, then went into the house.

Taíno "are a handsome, smart and kind people.... They offered to share with anyone and when you ask for something they never say no ... they would make good servants."

Historians say my ancestors were wiped out within a few generations, claiming authority over our death with explanations like disease, slave labour, and intermixing. My mother said they were wrong. "Taínos are alive to this day. Many were killed and enslaved, but there were those who escaped, and others who fled to the mountains. Do not believe stories told by people who say they 'discovered' us, as if we were unknown to the world, then took our land and told us we were extinct. We are Taíno. We know our ancestors' names and carry stories of the love they had for our people, the courageous ways they fought to protect Kiskeya, our homeland."

Years after my mom's passing, I learned of a resurgence movement she was part of that is growing in strength throughout the Caribbean and the United States. Taino people are re-emerging in the world, after living in hiding for 500 years. After everyone believed we were dead.

Indeed, Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island have been duped into believing in our own death for too long. Believing

the story that we are conquered, that everything is lost, including ourselves, and that our time of thriving is in the past. We are brainwashed to think the only way forward is to forget our names and all that we come from; to accept the fact that we have been summoned to a new life

in which we are no longer human beings connected to our spirits or our families or to the earth, imprisoned in service to the entity that poisons and exploits us at will.

We forget that anything came before, and that anything more exists. Death is one part of the story, but it is not our beginning. This is not who we are. The problem is, many act as though loss and defeat are where the stories of Indigenous peoples begin.

Maybe it has to do with Columbus putting us in shackles on our very first pages in their history of this place.

But we do not begin at 1492, or 1776, or 1867. We do not begin with conquest or colonization or the mass genocide of our peoples and destruction of our homelands. We do not begin with the Indian Act or residential schools or Aboriginal and treaty rights recognized and affirmed since 1982. We do not begin with thousands of missing and murdered mothers, sisters, and daughters. Loss of land and livelihood, stolen relatives, poverty, incarceration, broken families – these are not where our stories begin. The internalized violence and dysfunction within our communities are not how our stories begin. These are not our origins – they are our prisons, which we have been brainwashed into believing are our homes, our identities, our inherent attributes as a people, and the result of our own failure to keep up in a “civilized” world. These are

stories generated out of violence and greed, made to suffocate life and terrorize us out of embodying our own stories of connection and belonging.

Origin stories are power, and they are not just about the past. That's why we're lost when we don't know them. That's why erasure of our experience is a powerful weapon. That's why zombies are made to forget. When we remember where we

come from, we connect to our ancestral being. Ancestral being is the salt. It extends beyond presence in this form, in this world, in this time. Take in the salt and we become channels of unending life force.

Something tingling on my tongue. Vision enters my

eyes slowly, and they burn as if they haven't opened for an eternity. I blink. The body I'm in feels foreign, but it takes a deep breath and that feels good. Good ... strange to recognize a feeling. My thoughts search around faintly, but they feel my own. Like a secret freedom. My hands look familiar and when I move them they remember me. I am lying somewhere pleasant, graced with sunlight, soft and gentle. I lift my head but feel dizzy, disoriented, and nothing seems quite real. Except somehow everything does.

“Nadège,” someone says. “Byenveni lakay.”
Welcome home. ★



SIKU ALLOOLOO is an Inuit/Taino writer from Denendeh (Northwest Territories). Her work incorporates inherited legacies of resistance, continuity, and creative expression to support the revitalization and empowerment of Indigenous communities. Siku holds a BA in Anthropology and Indigenous Studies from the University of Victoria.

*We do not begin at 1492, or 1776, or 1867.
We do not begin with conquest or
colonization or the mass genocide of
our peoples and destruction of our
homelands. These are not our origins.*

THE COST *of*



MANAGED MIGRATION

The Temporary Foreign Worker Program has spawned a recruitment industry in Guatemala that promises workers stable employment in Canada, but instead delivers precarity and exploitation.

By GWENDOLYN MUIR
Illustration by EMILY MCGRATTEN

Ana Maria sits across from me in the empty dining hall of the hotel where she works. Starched white tablecloths lay folded over dozens of square tables. Her hands cup a cloth napkin that she folds back and forth.

"It wasn't until 2010 that I became interested in going to Canada. I was left without work and I saw it as a way to survive, to support my three daughters [as a single mother], and so I made the arrangements. Recruiters brought me to a farm to discuss going to Canada and they said I would have to wait, as there were others already in line.

"They spoke about what people in Canada did: planting, picking fruit or flowers. I had to leave a deposit. They gave us an account number, where we had to transfer the money; the only proof we had was the payment receipt of 10,000 quetzales (C\$1,806).

"Recruiters would call us together for meetings at different places – in town, at the gas station, or in the homes of the organizers – and would share information that couldn't have been true, because they always said we would travel in one month, then in another month, and another, and this was repeated until it had been over a year. It never happened. We were a big group, maybe 25 people, so imagine that, at Q10,000 each.

"Afterwards, ACADEC [another recruiter] appeared, and again I saw the potential for a better life. Here in Guatemala, when you see something that might improve your life, to live with a little more economic stability, to support your family, you take it. So I went to their offices, to a big farm where they had meetings and spoke about work in Canada.

"Everything seemed in order: we got passports, did tests, gave them all of our papers. They brought us to a clinic where we did a blood exam. We even had to pass a two-week training on Canadian farming, where they gave lectures and spoke about agriculture, how to plant and so

on, giving us all kinds of information and testing us about the work we would do. We got a diploma at the end, to certify us. The training cost was Q2,000 (C\$361). They said it was the price to prepare us to work in Canada. They even took our measurements for what they said would be uniforms and equipment. This also had a cost. Everything had a cost."

----- PRIVATIZING LABOUR

Every year, migrant workers are selected through the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) to fill more than 80,000 precarious, poorly paid agricultural, landscaping, and "lower-skilled" positions in Canada. Of those, over 6,000 workers are Guatemalans who are employed for low-waged work in Canada.

Guatemalans have become the largest incoming agricultural workforce for Quebec, making up over 65 per cent of the workers employed on Quebec farms. However, thousands of others from that

with a Labour Market Impact Assessment (LMIA), which reinforced the power of employers privatizing the insourcing of migrant labour.

In the early 2000s, the Quebec-based Foundation for the Recruitment of Foreign Agricultural Labour (FERME) began to seek out ways to hire agricultural labour from countries outside of those already participating in the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) – specifically, from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. By 2003, FERME and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Guatemala formally partnered to recruit workers to Canada. Their alliance marked the beginning of the deregulated TFWP.

An intergovernmental organization promoting "orderly migration for the benefit of all," the IOM administered the recruitment and management of Guatemalan workers for Canada for a decade, until accrued corruption charges

Migrant workers who are categorized as "low-skilled" are tied to their employer, paid minimum wage or less, and have no channels to access permanent residency.

country who have paid recruitment organizations to secure their employment in Canada have never arrived.

The recruitment of Guatemalan workers to Canada has become an industry unto itself.

The sourcing of Guatemalans for work in Canada began in 2003, under a program formerly known as the Guatemala Low-Skill Pilot Project. The foundation for the program had been laid eight years earlier, when Canada signed the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), a multilateral free trade agreement that created the framework for privatizing international trade in services. GATS facilitated the deregulation of migrant worker programs in Canada, making bilateral agreements obsolete. Workers could be granted temporary entry into Canada

from the Guatemalan state forced it to leave the Central American country in 2013.

Even before the IOM's expulsion, however, new recruitment organizations had already started to pop up in Guatemala: in 2009, FERME's private recruitment counterpart in Guatemala City, Amigo Laboral, began processing the majority of workers going to Canada. Another local development organization, ACADEC, began recruiting workers the following year. In the wake of the IOM's disappearance from Guatemala, five new recruitment organizations surfaced in 2013, profiting from the high demand for out-migration to Canada. Of the seven organizations currently recruiting labour from Guatemala, four are run by former IOM staff.

CREATING PRECARIETY

Two powerful processes – one economic, the other discursive – uphold the recruitment of migrant workers.

As pointed out by social justice organizer Harsha Walia, the category “migrant worker” is created and reinforced by a system of precarity, whereby employers hire workers who will always be excluded from permanent and protected labour. Migrant workers who are categorized as

as temporary and “out of place.”

In contrast to the myth of the benevolent, tolerant Canadian mosaic, Canada’s immigration regulations have always functioned to produce precarity and impose lawful dispossession onto racialized groups: from the banning and regulation of “non-preferred” – that is, non-white – races in the 19th and 20th centuries to the creation of the first migrant worker program in 1966 (around the time that possessing particular racial

Recruiters present work in Canada as an assured, safe option with “little to no possibility for labour discrimination or abuse.” The lawful structure of the TFWP is used as the basis to promote the program, as well as to justify training costs.

“low-skilled” are tied to their employer, paid minimum wage or less, and have no channels to access permanent residency. Typically, they do not have full access to labour protections, social services, or benefits. The risk of immediate deportation acts as a barrier to organizing against their exploitation.

The TFWP model of managed migration also depends on the discursive “othering” of migrants: it is the supposed “foreignness” of workers that legitimizes their precarity, despite living and working on the same territory as Canadians.

Canadian border-enforcement practices and the apartheid of mobility are founded upon lawful colonial violence: they depend on the ongoing dispossession and displacement of Indigenous peoples, and take shape through immigration categories that divide and commodify particular groups of people, constantly positioning migrants of colour

criteria became eliminated as a requirement for immigrating to Canada).

Changes to the TFWP in 2014 have nonetheless placed temporary migrants under even more precarious conditions: policies such as the “four in and four out” rule, shorter stays in Canada, and increasing application costs put workers arriving through the TFWP low-waged stream in a more vulnerable – and temporary – position than ever, particularly due to the burgeoning for-profit industry that has come to comprise Canadian managed migration.

PROMISES OF A BETTER LIFE

Why are so many Guatemalans signing up with recruitment agencies? A milieu of widespread poverty, insecurity, and displacement in Guatemala caused by years of imperialism, state violence, and the expansion of foreign agribusiness and mining projects (with over 88 per cent

of mines in Guatemala being owned by Canadian corporations) has positioned migration as a vital means of survival for hundreds of thousands of Guatemalans.

Many rural labourers migrate seasonally to coastal plantations or work in neighbouring countries – usually Mexico or the United States – as undocumented workers. As rumours of legal and “secure” out-migration to Canada have spread, however, there has been a growing demand for obtaining employment here.

Recruiters present work in Canada as an assured, safe option with “little to no possibility for labour discrimination or abuse.” Allegedly “free from risk,” the lawful structure of the TFWP is used as the basis to promote the program, as well as to justify training costs for producing the “qualified” and “disciplined” workforce required for “legal work” – despite the fact that the TFWP legally subjects workers to a system of labour apartheid, whereby workers are deportable, disposable, bound to a single employer, and denied access to the benefits and labour protections into which they pay.

THE RECRUITMENT INDUSTRY

Recruiters, meanwhile, hold power over work access, controlling what information is available to workers and determining what individuals must do – and what they must pay – to secure work in Canada. Requirements vary among employers and recruiters, giving rise to rampant fraud and misinformation; according to interviews with workers and agencies, many organizations demand payments simply for taking workers’ names.

Workers have reported an array of abuses from recruiters, from outright

FOUR IN and FOUR OUT

The “four in and four out” rule came into effect on April 1, 2015, effectively blocking workers who have been returning to Canada for four years or more from returning to work in Canada. Workers are required to leave Canada for four years, and then may reapply to the program. This legislation further impedes workers from organizing for better conditions or being able to access social benefits and has been called “one of the greatest mass deportation orders in history” by migrant justice organizers.

RECRUITMENT TRAINING

Training programs based on agricultural work requirements – such as specialized agricultural training, language classes, and observational testing to evaluate workers' capacity for compliance and diligence – have become commonplace. Three agencies run "model Canadian farms" in removed rural areas of Guatemala, where workers pay to carry out voluntary agricultural labour while being observed and trained. As described by one agency with over 275,000 members across Guatemala: "We, in a visionary way, ask workers to think that what they're doing here [in the training centre] is what they'll be doing in Canada.... We try to make sure that everything is in order, that everything [is done] obediently: personal hygiene, eating habits, listening and receiving orders, everything ... we have people from all over Guatemala and it is growing everyday."

fraud and the overnight disappearance of agencies to the misrepresentation of jobs or immigration requirements, the withholding of information and documents, and extensive pay deductions.

José, a worker from Santa Rosa, Guatemala, says, "Recruitment is a bad game, because you don't know [if you're really getting a job or not], and you can never know if it's true or a lie."

Guatemalan workers have reported paying fees ranging from Q2,000 to 80,000 (C\$355 to \$14,224), depending on the length of training, the desired job sector, or the level of corruption of the labour broker, with some brokers promising workers access to permanent residency once in Canada for a premium fee. Many workers who have paid these fees never leave Guatemala.

Samuel, a worker from Guatemala City, asserts: "[Recruiters] should stop charging money. People have paid too much money ... brokers are charging upwards of Q25,000 to 30,000 (about C\$4,445 to \$5,334) just to put workers on a waiting list."

As Canadian employers go shopping for recruiters to satisfy their labour preferences and profit margins, agencies are increasingly competing in a "race to the bottom" to send a cheap, disciplined, and specialized workforce to Canada. This leaves workers to shoulder ever-growing recruitment costs, despite the fact that, according to Employment and Social Development Canada, these costs should be covered by employers.

Canadian jobs, meanwhile, are

presented as exalted positions only for the most moral, qualified, and obedient ("good") workers. To be considered for a Canadian contract, workers must have "good moral character," a pristine legal record, strong mental and physical health, an obedient work ethic, proven agricultural expertise, and the capacity to withstand extreme weather, as well as family in Guatemala to ensure return.

One worker states, "Agencies carry out an exam on your ability, to see how well your brain works and how your hands

workers (*Ladino* refers to those of predominantly European descent or identifying as white in Guatemala) from Santa Rosa are primarily recruited for chicken catching, while Indigenous Kaqchikel workers from Chimaltenango are most commonly found in vegetable harvesting; some employers request people "from cold regions ... who can tolerate the cold," who, according to recruiters, may more easily "adapt" to Canadian seasons.

As one agency explains, "There are demands for specific kinds of people: the

With no limit to essentialized demands, employers go so far as to indicate the dress, marital status, and family structure of the workers they are seeking.

move.... [You also] need the mentality to go [to work in Canada], and the physical ability to do it."

Recruitment is also overtly racialized and gendered according to sector. Recruiters classify workers according to their height, weight, age, gender, regional climate, and racial and physical characteristics.

With certain attributes requested for specific jobs, classification has come to distinguish which workers – and regions – are "more suitable" for which kinds of employment. For example, sociologist Kerry Preibisch points out that Canadian employers consider Jamaican workers more suited to fruit tree picking, while Mexicans or Guatemalans are preferred for field harvests. This plays out on a regional level as well: taller Ladino

employer tells us that he needs someone between the age of 25 and 30, who measures 1.7 metres, for a chicken farm, so we need someone who is tall; but, if it is to cut cabbage, lettuce, or broccoli, we need someone who is shorter and a different age, and that is where worker classification comes in."

With no limit to essentialized demands, employers go so far as indicate the dress, marital status, and family structure of the workers they are seeking. One agency comments: "There are farms [in Quebec] that ask that women come only from rural areas in Chimaltenango, wear their traditional Indigenous dress, be single, and without commitments." ("Without commitments," in this sense, typically refers to being without children or family obligations.)

THE COST OF A JOB

Many workers take out substantial loans to meet recruitment costs, borrowing from family members, banks, or labour

productivity" and "bad behaviour" as common reasons for blocking workers from returning to Canada.

With limited options at home, Guatemalans nonetheless continue to

"You make deals to be able to get this money and pay for the paperwork. If you don't have the money, if you don't have cash, they accept loans, they accept cars, payment agreements, or you take out credit at the bank and leave your property as the guarantee."

brokers, often leaving their home or land as collateral in the hope that they will be sent north.

One worker explains, "I mortgaged my house to be able to take a loan out at the bank because that was what the bank asked me to do. I had to have a security deposit in case I wouldn't be able to pay, for the bank. So that the person I paid the money to [for recruitment] wouldn't have any problems. Right now I am barely making any money ... on top of loan payments, [I can't even cover] the costs of my kids' education and support my family."

Workers return to Guatemala at the end of their contract without any guarantees of being rehired in Canada the following season. To be recalled, they must be "named" by their employer as a "good" worker. Recruiters then manage which candidates will return and which become permanently blocked from the program.

The blacklisting of workers is arbitrary and widespread. One recruiter notes, "We had to block 400 workers for protesting [against their work conditions]."

Workers who speak out against dangerous or racist working conditions are often singled out as "troublemakers" and deported to Guatemala. Still, according to many workers and agencies, they have been excluded from work in Canada for situations outside of their control: an early end of the season in Canada, suffering from an accident at work, or having to tend to a sick family member in Guatemala. Recruiters have cited "low

seek employment opportunities in Canada and organize to reinstate their status as temporary workers, as seen with the Guatemalan Association United for Our Rights (AGUND), a group of blacklisted Guatemalan workers who have denounced program and agency abuses, and are fighting for the right to return to work in Canada.

Meanwhile, new recruiters continue to surface in Guatemala, promising to provide Canadian employment.

"THEY HAVE ALWAYS BEEN LIES"

Migration management institutions in Canada and abroad are increasingly attempting to control the mobility of "foreign" (read: racialized) peoples. Employers enjoy unrestricted access to precarious labour, while governments and migration "experts" market their discriminatory and exploitative policies as "for the benefit of all." Meanwhile, a growing sector of for-profit agencies capitalizes on the already limited claims to movement of workers driven into debt by the hope of working in an imagined Canada.

Under managed migration, workers remain perpetually positioned as displaceable and disposable by employers, recruiters, and the Canadian state. The very structure of the TFWP creates possibilities for exploitation and deepens relations of domination, while the dispossession of workers is presented as lawful and even charitable.

As Ana Maria tells me, "This situation happens because people are desperate.

You believe you'll be able to [recoup] the money you invest because obviously you can make a lot more money in Canada, salaries are better than here, and so you make deals to be able to get this money and pay for the paperwork, and be part of the group that might travel. And if you don't have the money, if you don't have cash, they accept loans, they accept cars, payment agreements, or you take out credit at the bank and leave your property as the guarantee. Or you turn to moneylenders, with high interest rates, who charge even more, and so you are left much more indebted, with more problems.

"My economic situation has gotten worse and so I'm always looking for ways to get some more stability, to [repair] my home, to have a more steady job, because I have three daughters, you know, that's why I'm always fighting.

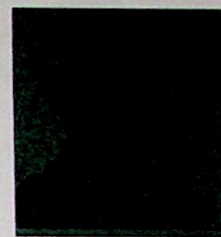
"I'm still looking for opportunities to work in Canada, but, well, they have always been lies, always. Yet here we are, thank the Lord, standing up and moving forward, each day an opportunity to rise up little by little. Perhaps I've been looking in the wrong places. This is what happens: you believe so deeply that you look in the wrong places." ★

Several days before this issue went to press, Briarpatch learned of the passing of Dr. Kerry Preibisch. Our hearts are heavy with the loss of a courageous scholar and defender of migrant justice.



GWENDOLYN MUIR is an organizer and border smashy-smash enthusiast based in Montréal/Tiohtià:ke on unceded Kanien'kehá:ka territories. She grew up in the farming region of Montérégie, on Wabanahkik lands split by the ever-maintained US - Canada border. You can get in touch with her at gwendolyn.madriguera@gmail.com.

QUOTES FROM THE UNDERGROUND



"I think for all movements, but particularly the migrant justice movement, it is so imperative to understand our responsibilities to Indigenous nations, to the lands on which we've come to reside, to not perpetuate settler-colonialism. And one of the ways in which settler-colonialism operates of course is to tell immigrants this story, this false story that we're being accepted into and need to be grateful to the Canadian state and to whiteness, when again, in fact, whiteness is not indigenous to these lands. And so I think it is so important for us to know and to act in solidarity with the true stewards of these lands. And that's an important gesture not just symbolically but because, it is also imperative to decolonize our own understanding of how we're migrating and where we're migrating to.

-HARSHA WALIA

"The thing to understand is that modern democracy is safely premised on an almost religious acceptance of the nation state. But corporate globalization is not. Liquid capital is not. So, even though capital needs the coercive powers of the nation state to put down revolts in the servants' quarters, this set up ensures that no individual nation can oppose corporate globalization on its own.

Radical change cannot and will not be negotiated by governments; it can only be enforced by the people. By the public. A public who can link hands across national borders."

-ARUNDHATI ROY

"Abolition is both a way of seeing the world and a way of being in and acting in the world. For me, it means understanding the connections between settler colonialism, the carceral state, white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, racialized capitalism, etc. But it is also a recognition of our responsibility to act upon these interconnected institutions of oppression in order to overcome obstacles to dignity and freedom. My own abolitionist politics have their roots in struggles around labor, immigration, and the incarceration of young people of color. These issues have opened my eyes to the connections between them and other forms of oppression that keep things exactly the way they are. They have also driven

home the fact that we cannot reform away oppression. It must be abolished."

-BRIAN LOVATO

"Feminism without borders is not the same as 'border-less' feminism. It acknowledges the fault lines, conflicts, differences, fears, and containment that borders represent. It acknowledges that there is no one sense of a border, that the lines between and through nations, races, classes, sexualities, religions, and disabilities, are real – and that a feminism without borders must envision change and social justice work across these lines of demarcation and division. I want to speak of feminism without silences and exclusions in order to draw attention to the tension between the simultaneous plurality and narrowness of borders and the emancipatory potential of crossing through, with, and over these borders in our everyday lives."

-CHANDRA TALPADE MOHANTY

Feminism Without Borders

"When I think of strength, I think of my mom crawling into the house because she had calcium heel spurs from working so hard and being on her feet so much, and just crying, crawling to the couch so she could heal up until the next day when she had to go out and work again. There was never any question that she was going to do it. So when I think of strength, I think of women. It's always been women in my life who've been the biggest intellectual influences and the biggest spiritual influences, and it's been the women in my life who have taught me the most about what kind of man I want to be and what kind of man I don't want to be."

-DANIEL HEATH JUSTICE

Indigenous Men and Masculinities

"One way of posing the question of who 'we' are in these times of war is by asking whose lives are considered valuable, whose lives are mourned, and whose lives are considered ungrievable. We might think of war as dividing populations into those who are grievable and those who are not. An ungrievable life is one that cannot be mourned because it has never lived, that is, it has never counted as a life

at all. We can see the division of the globe into grievable and ungrievable lives from the perspective of those who wage war in order to defend the lives of certain communities, and to defend them against the lives of others – even if it means taking those latter lives."

-JUDITH BUTLER

Frames of War

"We need to be reminded why Marxism ascribes a determinative primacy to class struggle. It is not because class is the only form of oppression or even the most frequent, consistent, or violent source of social conflict, but rather because its terrain is the social organization of production which creates the material conditions of existence itself. The first principle of historical materialism is not class or class struggle, but the organization of material life and social reproduction. Class enters the picture when access to the conditions of existence and to the means of appropriation are organized in class ways, that is, when some people are systematically compelled by differential access to the means of production or appropriation to transfer surplus labour to others."

-ELLEN MEIKSINS WOOD

Democracy Against Capitalism

"Borders
What's up with that?
Politics
What's up with that?
Police shots
What's up with that?
Identities
What's up with that?
Your privilege
What's up with that?
Broke people
What's up with that?
Boat people
What's up with that?
The realness
What's up with that?
The new world
What's up with that?
I'm gonna keep up on all that."

-M.I.A.

Borders

Conditions for Security

In a refugee camp in Lebanon, a young Syrian photographer captured moments of growth, life, and love.

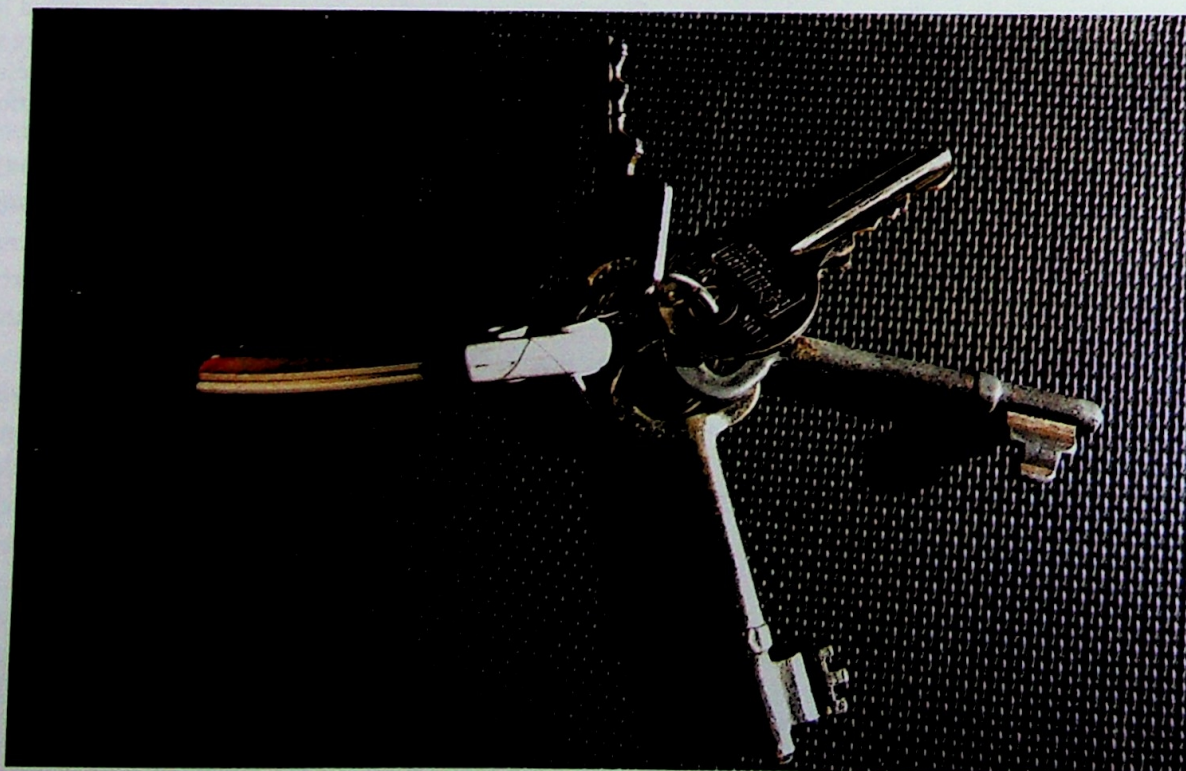
Photos by HANI AL MOULIA

Hani al Moulia grew up in Homs, Syria. When the civil war in Syria escalated, killing several of his relatives, he fled to Lebanon, where he lived in a refugee camp in Bekaa for three years. "After one year of doing nothing, and feeling far away from any chance to complete my university education," al Moulia explains, "I tried to find myself in other things that I could do to keep my heart and mind in good shape."

Then al Moulia met Brendan Bannon, a photojournalist who had arrived at the refugee camp to teach a two-week photography program. Al Moulia picked up a \$100 Fuji camera and began photographing life in the refugee camp, pouring his energy into "a project about the kids who have been born in the camp, because I believe that [the camp] will end some day. I want them to see this picture and see the difference when they realize it's not their normal life."

Al Moulia's photos reflect his deliberate approach to capturing moments. His vision is impaired by nystagmus, an involuntary movement of the eyes that prevents them from focusing and seeing certain colours. While he cannot see through the camera's viewfinder, his photography method centres on what he describes as "taking a photo with my mind. I care about the angles, the subject, and details over the settings, and with practice all of those things together become like a feeling."

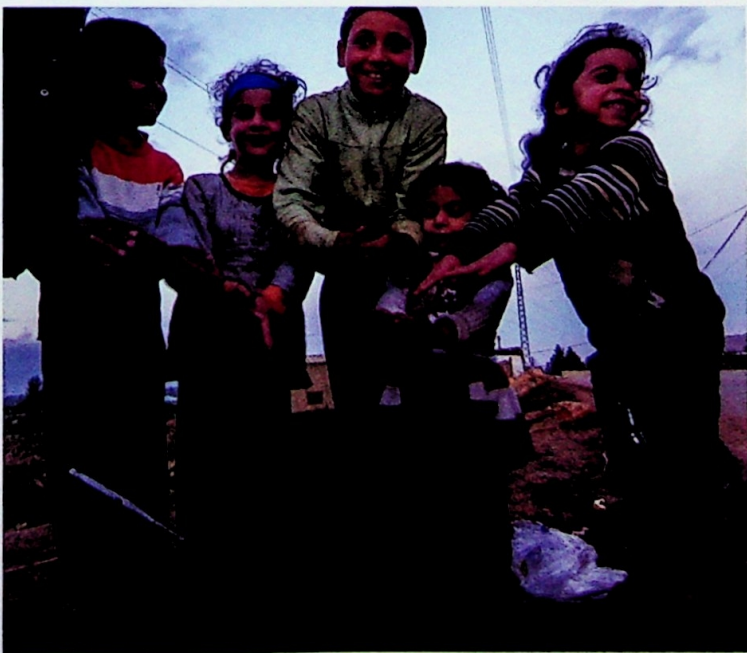
Al Moulia and his family left the refugee camp in June 2015. Today, al Moulia lives in Regina, Saskatchewan, where he is studying English and making plans to study computer engineering. "One of my goals now is to help refugees around the world by telling their stories and how they are living, and also share all that I've learned with them."



"A Tearful Laugh." It was simultaneously funny and sad when I asked my mom: "Why did you bring the house keys with you?" And without an answer, everyone began to laugh, because these keys are useless as they are the keys to a house that is almost completely destroyed. My mom's laugh quickly turned into tears that paved their path onto her cheeks and silenced the sound of that brilliant laugh... I also cried after that scene.



Everywhere, they've started asking, "Can you take a picture of me?"



Real warmth is to be with who you love, anywhere: This is what I learned from this scene of a family. The father is trying to fix the stove (which needs wood) and the kids are trying to have fun around their father.



"My Own Orchestra." Ohhh... A moment outside time from our third show in a week! Our instruments with multiple uses provide the refugee camp with tunes of happiness.



Left: Outside Time. He hops onto the shoulders of his brother. They are like a mountain of happiness. The little one laughs until he is tired. He descends from this mountain of happiness to the wreck of the miserable camp.

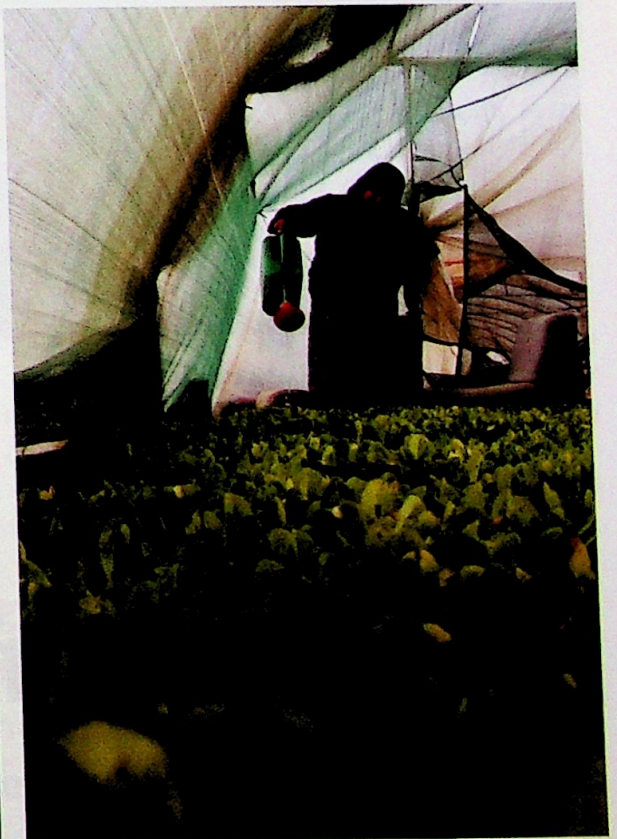
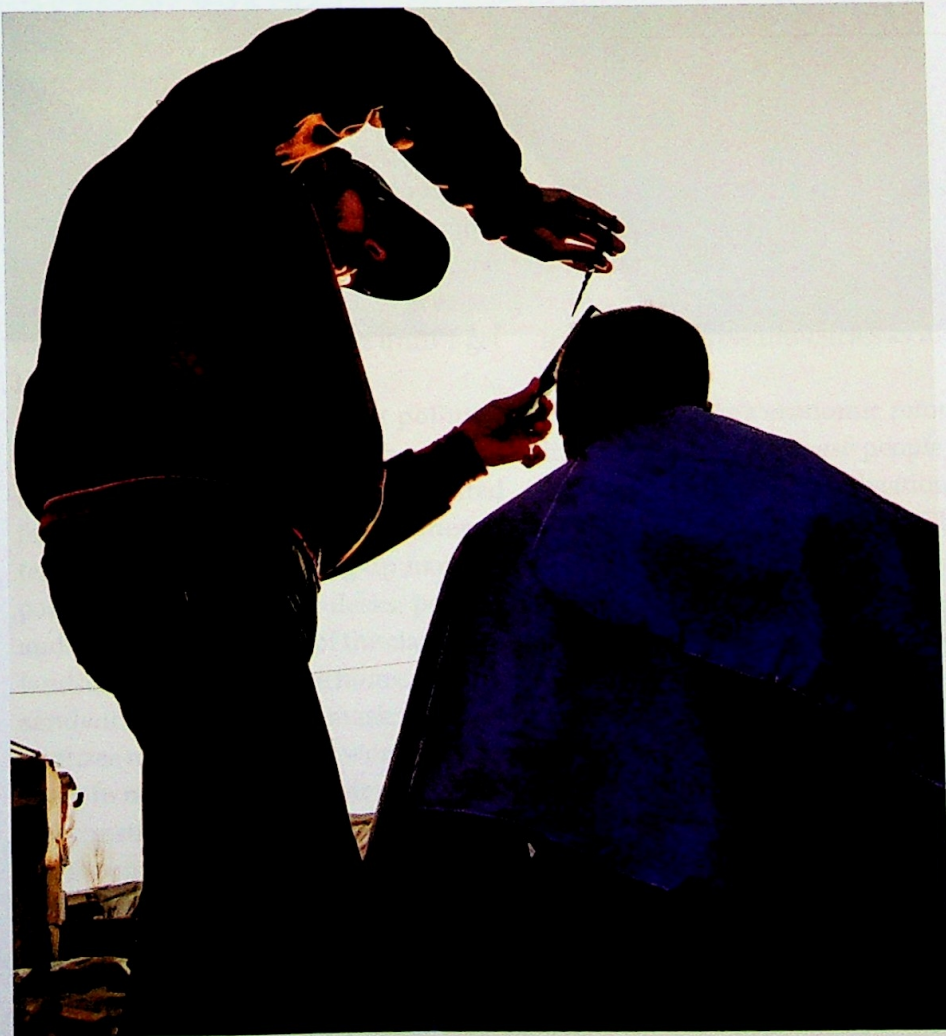
Bottom left: Normal fuel can take you to the city or to the camp, but I will tell you about the fuel that can take you anywhere you want to be. Yes, it's your imagination.



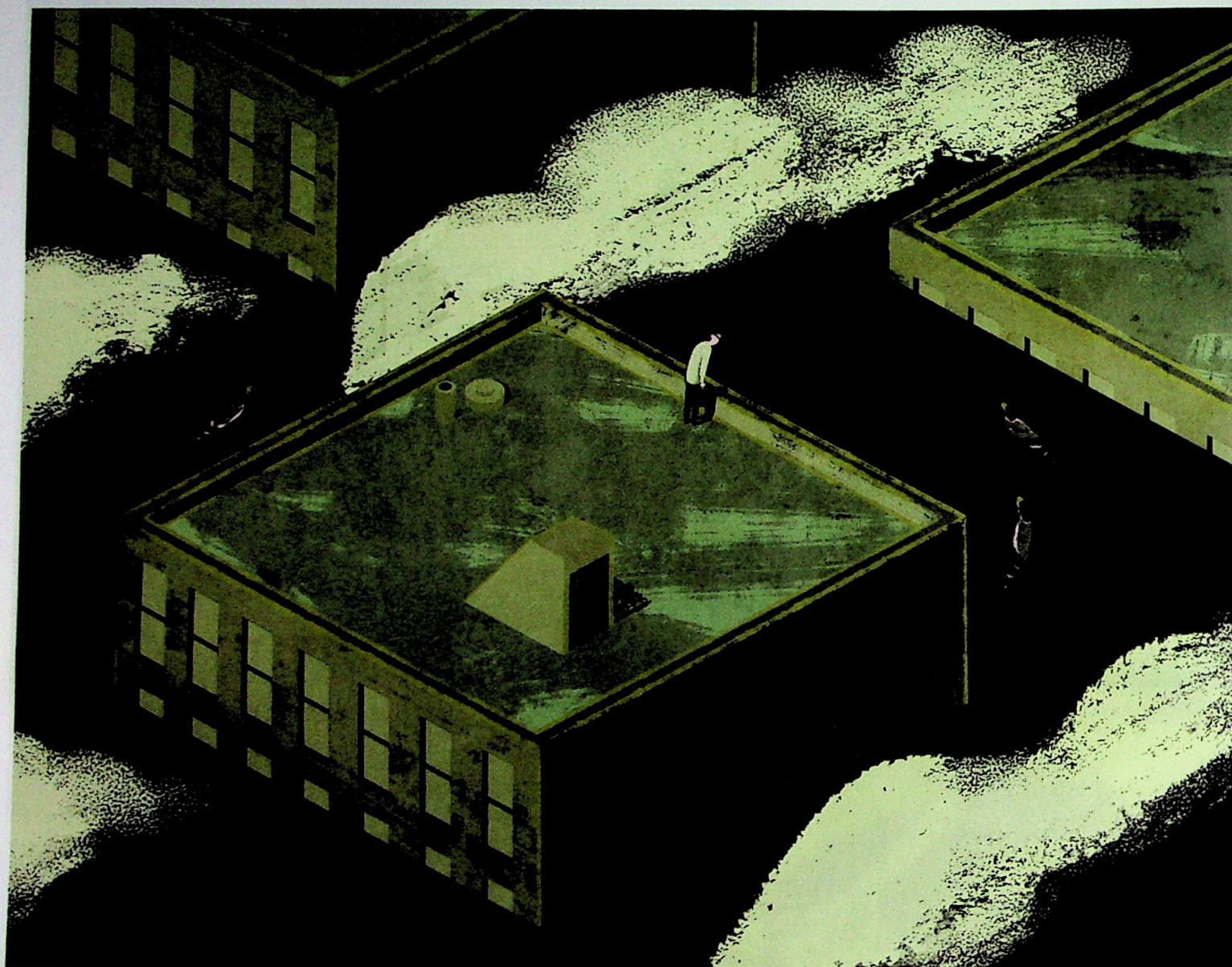
Opposite, top: It's great to see my siblings going for a walk before sunset. When I took this picture from the side of the road, I felt a bit astonished, and I asked myself, when will we reach the end of the road? This road on which we can see no specific horizon.

Opposite, bottom left: In the camp where I live, this is what the operation of getting your hair cut looks like. A barber is called and the operation is often done outside in order to keep the tents clean. This is reality.

Opposite, bottom right: "All I want is to return to my country and live far away from all this tiredness," says this woman.



HANI AL MOULIA is a freelance photographer and student in Regina, Saskatchewan.



The Luxury of Air

The liberalization of China's economy has widened the gap between rich and poor, rendering clean air and clean water a privatized luxury.

By MATT MOIR

Illustrated by RAZ LATIF

From her roadside food cart in southeastern Beijing, Chen serves breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

The most popular item on the menu is *ji dan guan bing*, a simple sandwich featuring a fried egg, lettuce, and tomatoes wrapped in a warm shell of deep-fried naan bread slathered in a tangy, spicy chili sauce.

It's a snack sold by countless vendors across the city, but nowhere is it better than at Chen's stall.

It's shockingly delicious, and it costs four yuan – the equivalent of about C\$0.85.

A piping hot *ji dan guan bing* is also extraordinarily unhealthy and on most days, I guiltily eat one on my walk home from work. Other days, though, I'm wearing a mask, so I have to wait until I get home to enjoy my sandwich.

Beijing is one of the most polluted major cities in the world (though it should be noted that not all cities are measured for pollution). At the school where I teach, air purifiers soaking up harmful particles are, as much as desks, posters, and students' work, part of the classroom landscape. When I arrive home with my sandwich, I take off my mask and turn on three more air purifiers – one for each room in my apartment. Their gentle hum is a constant reminder of the lethality of the air on the other side of the window.

Chen is not so fortunate. She spends 10 hours a day at the side of a road, steps from a busy intersection. Cars and buses idle next to her stall all day long.

When asked if she's concerned about working outdoors in the Beijing air six days a week, her response comes quickly and emphatically.

"I'm very concerned about the air. But I don't have the skills or education to do something else. So I must be outside."

Chen, unfortunately, can't do much to protect herself from Beijing's poisonous air. In her city, healthiness is reserved for the privileged few.

ECONOMIC & ENVIRONMENTAL CONTAMINATION

In the late 1970s, President Deng Xiaoping ushered in policies that decentralized economic development; Beijing gave authority to the Chinese provinces to build and grow industries as they saw fit.

While China's economic reform has lifted millions of Chinese people out of extreme poverty, the liberalization of the economy has come at a cost: China is now one of the most polluted countries in the world. Much of that pollution is a result of coal-burning operations.

Factories and industrial zones proliferated across the country, but because the wealth and power of local officials depended on continuous economic growth, provincial governments were

(and, in some cases, continue to be) loath to abide by national environmental laws.

Today, millions of acres of the country's farmland are so contaminated from industrial runoff that growing food crops there is forbidden, and nearly two-thirds of China's underground water is unfit for human contact, according to the Chinese Ministry of Environmental Protection.

A recent report from independent research group Berkeley Earth stated that air pollution kills an average of 4,400 people a day in China. According to the study, breathing in airborne particulate matter less than 2.5 microns in diameter (PM_{2.5}) can cause a variety of health issues, including asthma, lung cancer, and heart attacks.

Though the degradation of China's environment is comprehensive, the effects of pollution are not shared equally among its citizens.

That's because in China, the wealth gap is enormous.

Though the degradation of China's environment is comprehensive, the effects of pollution are not shared equally among its citizens.

About one third of the country's wealth is concentrated in the hands of just one per cent of its citizens, and the poorest quarter of its 1.4 billion people owns a mere one percent of that wealth.

In major cities like Beijing and Shanghai, millions of migrant workers from poor villages make up approximately 40 per cent of the urban labour force. Unlike affluent people, who can afford to insulate themselves from the harmful effects of pollution, marginalized Chinese people on the lower end of the socio-economic scale are forced to bear the noxious brunt of China's economic juggernaut.

CLASS PRIVILEGE

Blue skies can be rare in some parts of China.

Air is considered clean if the level of PM_{2.5} is 50 or lower, and hazardous if it is 300 or above. Throughout the year and particularly during the winter in Beijing, when more coal is burned for heat, it's not uncommon for pollution levels to exceed 500, or about 20 times the World Health

annual incomes ranging from C\$6,000 to C\$25,000 – have resources that enable them to significantly reduce the impact of toxic air.

According to professor Michael Brauer of the University of British Columbia's School of Population and Public Health, "Wealthier individuals may live in homes or work in buildings with mechanical ventilation systems or air conditioning, or have air purifiers ... all of which lead to reduced levels of many indoor pollutants... In addition, they may also live on higher floors in high-rise buildings where pollution levels are lower than at street level. Wealthier populations may also be able to temporarily remove themselves during very high pollution episodes by travelling to cleaner locations."

Air purifiers are, in fact, big business in China, and sales have increased dramatically over the past several years.

But the average price for a foreign brand air purifier – which is generally considered to be of much higher quality than a domestic purifier – is around 2,000 to 3,000 yuan, or about C\$550 to C\$660. A white-collar

professional in Beijing might consider 2,500 yuan a small price to pay for clean air, but the investment in an air purifier is still hefty, considering that the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Human Resources and Social Security has calculated the average salary of a resident of Beijing to be 77,000 yuan (C\$17,000) per year.

CLEAN FOOD – FOR SOME

When asked if he's concerned about the pollution in Beijing, delivery driver Li Meng Lei shrugs.

"I guess so. I'm willing to move to another city with less pollution, but I don't have an education," says Li.

Six days a week, the 30-year-old zips in and out of Beijing's treacherous traffic, delivering packages to businesses. Li isn't

originally from Beijing, but he's lived in the city for two years.

He wears a helmet, but he doesn't wear a mask.

"I'm used to [the air pollution]. Every day since I was little, I've seen it. Where I come from, we call it smog."

Eating and drinking in China can be a gamble, too.

Over the last several years, there have been numerous high-profile food safety scandals in China. In 2008, milk powder tainted with melamine, a toxic industrial material, killed six babies and made hundreds of thousands ill. Since then, watermelons have exploded from the misuse of a growth accelerator chemical, pork has been contaminated with a detergent additive, rat meat has been passed off as pork, steamed buns have been tainted with pesticides, and thousands of dead pigs have drifted down Shanghai's Huangpu River, one of the city's primary sources of drinking water.

Against this backdrop, expats and wealthy Chinese are willing to spend a premium on food they believe to be safe. Chinese and foreign entrepreneurs have begun to privatize food and water marketed as safe.

The organic food industry, for example, is booming: sales of organic foods reached 80 billion yuan in 2012 (C\$17 billion). Residents of cities like Beijing or Shanghai can place an online order from an organic farm, and have seasonal food grown on that farm delivered within 48 hours. Many farms also deliver meat, poultry, and grains.

Though organic food consumption represents only about one per cent of total food consumption in China, that number has tripled since 2007. And the Chinese water filter industry expects market sales to reach 7 million units in 2017, up from 1.2 million units in 2010.

Organic food is popular with middle- and upper-class Chinese families in big cities like Beijing and Shanghai, but

Air purifiers are big business in China, and sales have increased dramatically over the past several years.

Organization's recommended limit.

The effects on residents' health are dire. Air pollution in Beijing has been linked to lung cancer, heart attacks, and premature births.

China's environment ministry recommends that residents stay inside when the PM_{2.5} level hits 200 for more than 72 consecutive hours, but staying inside is not an option for the vendors, shopkeepers, construction labourers, and other outdoor workers upon whose labour Chinese cities' economies depend.

Middle-class and wealthy residents of Beijing or other large Chinese cities are, of course, not immune to the cornucopia of deleterious health effects linked to poor air quality. But middle-class people – those who live in households with

pesticide-free meat and produce doesn't come cheap. A one-time delivery of six kilograms of vegetables, a dozen eggs, and a bag of rice from an organic grocer can cost nearly 300 yuan (C\$66) – five times more expensive than a standard supermarket trip. Water filters for the shower and kitchen sink typically cost about 1,000 yuan (C\$220) and 3,000 yuan (C\$660), respectively.

The reality for average-income families in cities like Beijing is that they cannot afford the luxury of peace of mind when it comes to what's on their plates or flowing from their taps.

STATE COMPLICITY

Transferring the burden of pollution from the rich to the poor is government policy, according to Judith Shapiro, author of *China's Environmental Challenges* and professor in the Global Environmental Politics program at American University in Washington, D.C.

"China's horrific environmental problems are no different from those elsewhere in one key respect: An underlying dynamic is the displacement of environmental harm from wealthy, politically connected populations close to the center of power to the more vulnerable in the periphery," explains Shapiro.

"While it is easy to celebrate the rising middle class' resistance to highly polluting factories ... all too often they simply move to more remote areas. In China, we see this dynamic in the relocation of landfills from city centers to outskirts, of polluting enterprises from cities to rural areas. We also see more pollution move from the wealthy East to the less developed West, where ethnic minorities are in a poor position to fight back..."

Chinese people from across the socio-economic spectrum are not accepting this without a fight, however. Over the past year, there have been scores of

environmental protests against polluting factories, power plants, and waste incinerator projects.

And there are indications that the government is listening. During the National People's Congress in March, President Xi Jinping vowed that Beijing would "punish, with an iron hand, any violators who destroy [China's] ecology or environment, with no exceptions."

Chinese leaders realize that the state's political legitimacy is entirely dependent upon a continued upward trajectory of citizens' quality of life. Cities blanketed in a thick, brown haze don't fit that vision.

That's why it is possible that what Shapiro calls "state-led environmentalism" is not a series of empty gestures. In 2014, legislators passed the first amendments to China's environmental protection law in 25 years, promising increased powers for environmental authorities and tougher punishments for polluters. More than 8,000 people were arrested within the past year for a variety of offences, ranging from failing to complete environmental impact assessments to ignoring warnings to stop polluting.

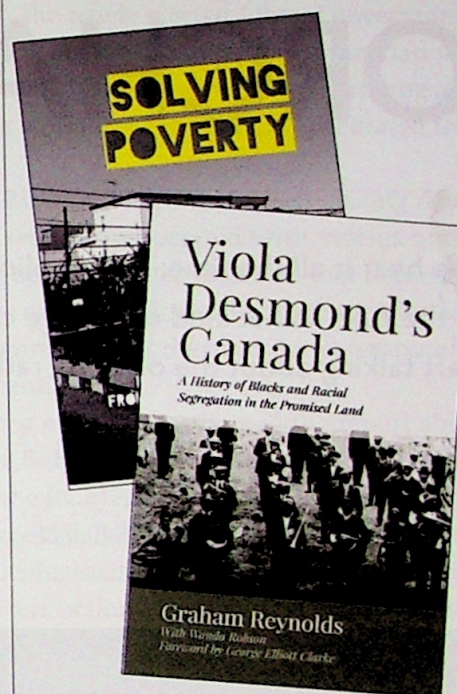
But China's pollution problem is critical, and it will take far more than throwing a handful of factory owners in prison to clean up the smog-choked air of cities like Beijing.

Can the central government – which prides itself on its ability to take bold and decisive action – significantly improve the country's air, water, and soil quality? All things in contemporary China seem to be possible, but for the time being, working-class Beijingers continue to be excluded from the luxury of breathing clean air. ★



MATT MOIR has written and reported in Canada for the CBC, CTV News and Sun Media. He now freelances for magazines and websites all over the world. Matt lives in Beijing.

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UNSETTLING THE ORCHARD

We hear it all the time: racist police officers are “bad apples” – exceptions to the rule. What kind of change can the conversation provoke when we start talking about the orchard, rather than the apples?

By MICHELLE STEWART

Illustration by TREVOR WAURECHEN



Some of the worst racists carry a gun, and they carry a badge authorized by you, Commissioner Paulson, to do the work. We need you to confront racism in the ranks.”

Grand Chief Doug Kelly, leader of the Sto:lo Tribal Council from unceded Coast Salish Territory in British Columbia, delivered this indictment to RCMP commissioner Bob Paulson on December 9, 2015, at the annual meeting of the Assembly of First Nations. He was referring to the everyday racism faced by Indigenous peoples at the hands of the RCMP, and he pushed the commissioner to take action on racism in his ranks.

“Shame on you, Mr. Paulson,” Grand Chief Kelly pressed. “You want to earn trust? You start by owning the truth, and apologizing. And doing more than apologizing. You start acting on the direction of government about reconciliation.” The grand chief admonished the RCMP, which will assume a central role in the coming months as the new federal government takes aim at a massive overhaul of the justice system while laying the foundation for a national inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women.

The RCMP commissioner then took the stage. “I hear what you say,” he said. “I understand that there are racists in my police force. I don’t want them to be in my police force.”

Paulson urged the audience of Indigenous leaders to “have confidence in the processes that exist, up to and including *calling me* [emphasis added] if you are having a problem with a racist in your jurisdiction.” He assured the audience that the RCMP has “elaborate systems to bring accountability to those people ... who are empowered to deliver policing services.”

I want to scrutinize his response, which emphasized the singular nature of the racism in the RCMP. This exchange, at this particular political moment in Canada, is embedded in a much bigger discussion – one that needs to be unsettled.

Events like the encounter between the grand chief and the RCMP commissioner offer critical opportunities to look at the ways in which racism is framed. The language can often involve premature gestures of resolution. Systemic issues are not issues of immediate resolution. Rather, they demand that we pause and deliberate. Premature, rushed solution-seeking can distract us from the real work at hand, which is messy, troubling, and difficult work. I write this as a settler living in Treaty 4 Territory. From my perspective, a discussion about racism in policing cannot be a simple matter. It requires a willingness to discuss settler colonialism and systems of oppression *and* privilege.

----- RESETTING THE SCENE

After six years of investigating the sexual, physical, and emotional abuse that took place in government-funded residential schools, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) released its full recommendations in 2015. The report, unprecedented in its scope and findings, importantly locates residential schools in the contemporary matrix of settler colonialism, including poverty,

incarceration, and violence. Of note, recommendations 25 to 42 explicitly focus on the justice system and call for reform at the local, provincial, and federal levels.

In December 2015, the newly elected Liberal government committed to implementing the TRC’s 94 recommendations, and announced a national inquiry to investigate missing and murdered Indigenous women. Many people speculated that change was afoot.

Meanwhile, the CBC announced that it was closing down all of its comments sections associated with stories about Indigenous peoples. The broadcaster indicated that these specific fields have become overwhelmingly filled with such “hateful and vitriolic” racist comments that the news outlet temporarily suspended any commenting.

It was this backdrop of news that framed the report about RCMP commissioner Bob Paulson’s response to Grand Chief Kelly’s indictment of the RCMP.

What Paulson suggested, behind his conciliatory tone at the meeting, was that individual acts of racism are the result of rogue racist officers; the officers’ actions could be handled swiftly with mechanisms of accountability within the police force. He did not

Systemic racism is obscured when it is reframed as the single actions of particular individuals.

indicate that he recognized racism as a systemic issue, nor as a direct effect of settler colonialism. Paulson spoke about isolated racism in a country where, in the broader context, the national news network had to disable the comments section on stories about Indigenous peoples because commenters consistently crossed the publisher’s decency guidelines.

Paulson agreed with Grand Chief Kelly: there are racists in the force. But, in his view, those racists are outliers; they are unwanted, they are limited, and a single phone call can solve any (infrequent) occurrence. Paulson offered a simple solution to a complex problem.

But systemic racism is not going to be solved with a phone call.

As a colonial state, Canada has built up systems that privilege settlers. Systemic racism is obscured when it is reframed as the single actions of particular individuals. This allows settlers to look for quick solutions and avoid facing the systemic nature of racism – to avoid that messy, troubling, and difficult work.

----- APPLES OR ORCHARD?

In his speech, Grand Chief Kelly asked Commissioner Paulson, “Why is it I have to keep dealing with bad apples?” He observed that, within the RCMP, there were “wonderful public servants.”

**Unsettling these systems demands
that we do away with the
“bad apples” metaphor, which
erases the systemic nature of
actions, policies, “accountability
processes,” and responses.**

He also affirmed, “I love and respect *those* [emphasis added] public servants.... But I’m talking about the *other* ones [emphasis added].” Kelly was fierce in naming racism in his initial critique, but he quickly hedged his bets to avoid indicting *all* police – only the bad apples.

The problem with the “bad apples” metaphor is that it obscures the systemic nature of racism.

We need to be able to talk about systems, not people. People make up systems, yes, but if we get lost in a discussion about the people who make up systems, we lose sight of the fact that there are systems that organize our society. If we talk about the systems, we can start to draw links to the root problems of ongoing racism and have a meaningful dialogue about important issues.

Take, for example, the fact that upwards of 80 per cent of people incarcerated in Saskatchewan are Indigenous when they only comprise just over 15 per cent of the overall population. Over 1,200 Aboriginal women and girls have been killed or are missing in Canada – and that number is actually higher, given the many more whose deaths were not investigated or who were not categorized as missing or murdered. We could discuss the massive overrepresentation of Indigenous children in the child welfare system. In Manitoba, for example, upwards of 90 per cent of the 10,000 children in state custody are Aboriginal, which has prompted the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs to hire its own child advocate. The welfare system apprehends children from families that have themselves experienced historical state-executed traumas, including residential schools and the ‘60s Scoop. These are all results of *systems* of oppression, and these systems are much more powerful and entrenched than the individuals implementing them. Unsettling these systems demands that we do away with the “bad apples” metaphor, which erases the systemic nature of and the histories that inform actions, policies, “accountability processes,” and responses from government departments, legislative representatives, and police forces.

Oppression is not the result of a few bad apples. It is an outcome of specific systems of justice, education, health, and social services, which each uphold powerful practices that, taken together, produce particular outcomes. Systemic oppression

requires a sharp instrument to dissect these systems and identify specific actions that facilitate ongoing programs of oppression. Cut open the system to identify the actions first, but don’t stop there.

The “bad apple” metaphor is propelled by ongoing complacency, apathy, and derailment tactics. It allows individuals to use the language of anti-racism to call for an inquiry or justice system reform, but it does not actively unsettle the very systems that sustain oppression. In the absence of solidarity work that unsettles entire, complex systems, settlers and others can find themselves believing that the situation in Canada is simply a case of a few bad apples. They say, “This is not *my* Canada,” when they read about oppression. To them, I say: “This is *your* Canada.” If we are stuck with the metaphor of bad apples, then Canada is an orchard that has been rotting since its colonial inception. ★

A version of this article first appeared on Michelle Stewart's Changing Suns Press blog, Unsettled, on December 16, 2015.



MICHELLE STEWART works on social justice issues including migrant justice and racialized policing. She lives on Treaty 4 territory and teaches about social justice. Her research focuses on how disabilities are taken up in the justice system in a settler state.

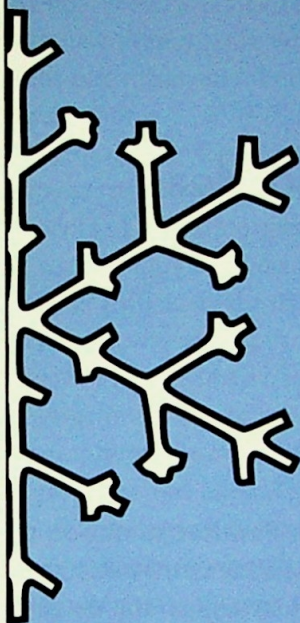
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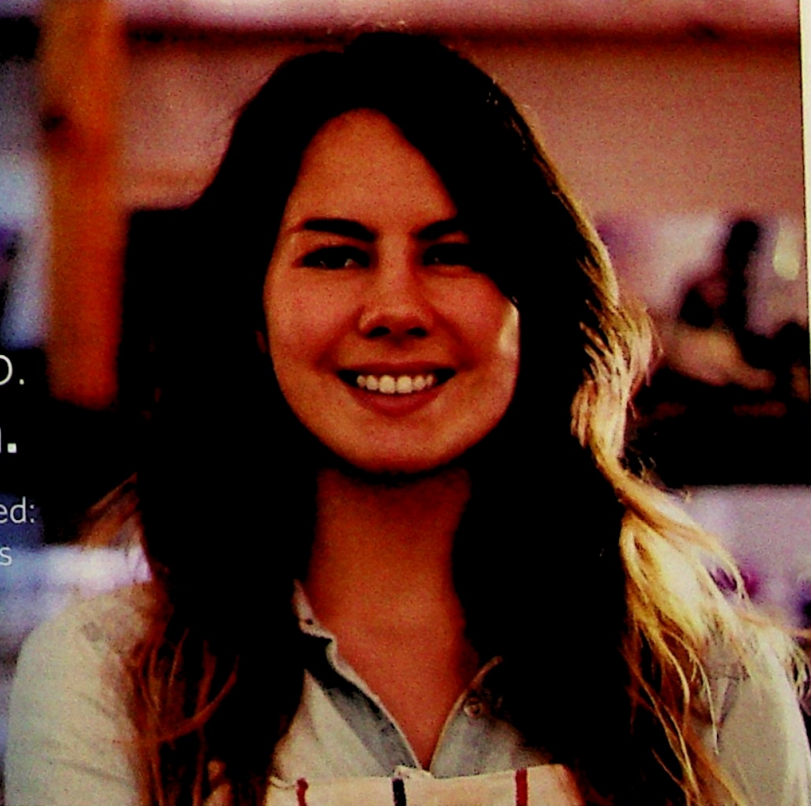


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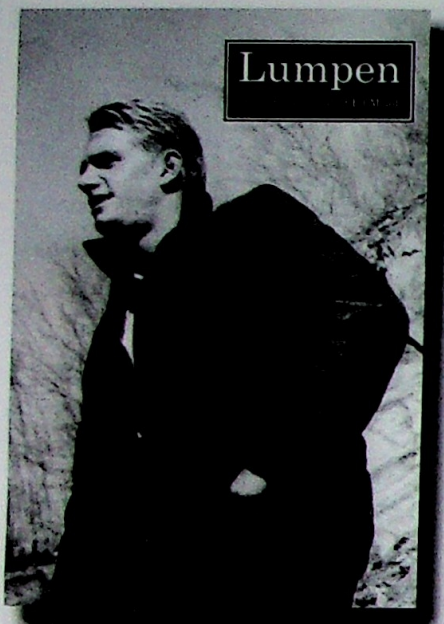
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Lumpen: The Autobiography of Ed Mead

By Ed Mead
Kersplebedeb, 2015

Reviewed by Aric McBay

Ed Mead's autobiography, *Lumpen*, tells a story of a revolutionary life. Mead writes openly and unflinchingly about his days as a social prisoner, his time in the underground George Jackson Brigade, and his work as a prison organizer and founder of Men Against Sexism. The title, *Lumpen*, refers to Marx's term lumpenproletariat – a social underclass of gangsters, swindlers, and petty criminals who, Marx argued, had no revolutionary potential; Mead sets out to prove Marx wrong about the lumpenproletariat's contributions to social justice and revolution.

Mead was born into poverty in California in 1941. His parents split up when he was young, and he spent his childhood moving around the U.S., wherever his mother thought they could scrape out a living. Eventually, they settled in Alaska, where Mead spent his teen years. These unstable and difficult circumstances in his formative years led to a lifetime of recurrent incarceration. In prison, he became politicized.

But this is not a revolutionary's fairy tale of self-aggrandizement, and it's clear that Mead is less interested in making himself look good than in giving a frank

recounting of a life from which others can learn.

As a young man, Mead spent much of his time behind bars, serving time both for crimes of poverty and for crimes he never committed. His encounters with the law were numerous: a case of burglary here and there, an arrest for a robbery he didn't commit, a stint in jail for "vagrancy" after Grade 9 because he had no place to live.

Mead developed his political awareness inside the prison system, becoming a jailhouse lawyer to fight his own criminal charges. In a page-turning section of *Lumpen*, he retells his story of

after the Black Panther member. In solidarity with prisoner, anti-racist, and anti-imperialist struggles, the Brigade staged dozens of bank robberies ("expropriations") and bombings against government and corporate targets, including the Washington Department of Corrections, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the FBI. An armed group, the Brigade adhered to George Jackson's praxis, which called for revolutionary activism to carry with it the threat of revolutionary violence.

The group had mixed-class backgrounds; most members of the group were queer, and roughly half were women. Historian Daniel Burton-Rose

"Brave fighters but apt to be destructive, they can become a revolutionary force if given proper guidance." Mead argues that such guidance comes from dialogue and the study of revolution.

notes, "In a period when the movement (anti-imperialist, prisoners' rights, feminist and queer liberation) was dividing along political, racial and

being thrown into prison for a variety of crimes, and being released years early due to a bureaucratic error. His experiences of the arbitrary nature of the court system launched his anti-prison, anti-racist, and anti-imperialist activism.

Finally out of prison in the mid-1970s, Mead co-founded the Seattle-based George Jackson Brigade, a seven-member underground revolutionary group named

gender lines, the George Jackson Brigade was striking for its diversity."

The bombings and armed actions aimed to target institutions and systems of violence, not individuals – though this distinction would, in the case of one bombing, become blurred. During a labour dispute involving grocery chain Safeway, the Brigade set off a bomb at a Safeway store during business hours.

Their warning call didn't go as planned, and the explosion injured a number of customers, after which they issued a public apology (an unusual step for an armed group). Mead was again imprisoned after a bank robbery gone wrong that ended with two other members of the Brigade being shot.

Though the George Jackson Brigade represents one of the most famous aspects of Mead's organizing, his book is surprisingly brief on the topic. Mead focuses instead on the trajectory of his life in prison, where he spearheaded organizing to defend prisoners' civil rights. In an environment where sexual violence and homophobia are rampant, Mead founded a group called Men Against Sexism to combat misogyny, homophobia, and rape gangs. Men Against Sexism members produced a magazine against rape culture, held film screenings, and dressed in drag to protest a homophobic preacher.

The work that Mead did, both inside and outside of prison, remains of enduring importance, and there is a great deal

we can learn from the struggles in which he engaged, not least from the debate about the use of revolutionary violence to protest systemic violence.

Despite Marx's dismissive attitude toward the lumpenproletariat, Mead became a Marxist while in prison. In the book, Mead encourages other prisoners to spend time studying Marx's philosophy, "the science of revolution." Mead quotes Mao Zedong's more nuanced attitude toward the lumpen: "Brave fighters but apt to be destructive, they can become a revolutionary force if given proper guidance." Mead, in the end, argues that such guidance comes from dialogue and the study of revolution.

Lumpen is more about the history of action than the analysis of it. While Mead occasionally takes a few pages to discuss why he did something, the politics are mostly woven in with the narrative. The result is a book that draws in readers, gives insight into Mead's thinking, and offers useful political lessons for people engaged in all kinds of struggles.

Furthermore, Mead's autobiography tells a story that has in some ways been overshadowed. I can find stacks of books about the Black Panthers and the Weather Underground, but few histories have been written about the cross-class, feminist, and mostly queer George Jackson Brigade. What's more, most political histories are written by professors, not by poor kids who grew up to be prisoner-revolutionaries. As a grassroots account of prison struggles, cross-movement solidarity, and revolutionary history, Mead's story in *Lumpen* is one that needed to be written, and one that deserves to be read. ★



ARIC McBAY is an author, activist, and organic farmer. He lives near Kingston, Ontario, the prison capital of Canada. He's active in prison justice campaigns, as well as other social and ecological justice issues.

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SUSTAINER PROFILE #37

NAOMI BEINGESSNER



Naomi Beingessner helps community-based organizations and university faculty carry out research projects that respond to community needs. Every evening, she reads to one or the other of her children, introducing them to all of the richness of life. In other hours, Naomi knits, gardens, and preserves food. She likes creating useful things and minimizing waste, and she is driven by issues of food sovereignty.

What is the most rewarding aspect of facilitating community-based research?

I find it personally rewarding to learn so much about issues I'd never thought of before, such as (in a current project) barriers to getting help in situations of interpersonal violence and abuse when animal safekeeping is a concern.

What one community-based change would you like to see in Regina?

I'd like to see the municipality and smaller communities (neighbourhood associations or churches or other coordinating bodies) meaningfully explore, discuss, and act on the recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

What are you knitting these days?

I'm not sure how much I should geek out in this answer, so I'll just say stranded houndstooth check mittens.

How do you motivate people to minimize waste?

I don't tend to proselytize about waste because I've seen that approach put people off. The approach is to make it seem easy and enjoyable. A clothing swap is a good example: reusing clothes; appreciating style, fabrics and colours; getting together.

Why do you read and support *Briarpatch*?

I started because it's a bit of a family tradition. When I was little, I thought the only magazines were *Briarpatch*, *Mother Jones*, and *Harrowsmith*. Supporting *Briarpatch* also means supporting a community of great people.

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Home Sweet Homestead

What's it like to leave behind bright city lights, the gentrification squeeze, and renoviction culture for the Homestead?

I'm standing with friends in a smoke pit, a gated-off section of a Hastings back alley. This is the first queer dance party I've been to in a year. When I was younger, what I wanted most in these spaces was to be visible, to belong, to find love.

Now, as I take in all the glowing, grinding queer bodies, I notice that I don't need them to see me anymore. Tomorrow I'm getting in my beat-up black pickup and driving home, back to my goats, pigs, chickens, and kitten.

I decide to leave the party and rest, but just before I do, I receive a pickup attempt – for me, a rarity in a queer space. It's a note that reads: "pink hair and big scarf. ask me to dance. i won't say no."

I came of age on unceded Coast Salish territories. Several years ago, I co-created a bustling collective house in East Vancouver. It had an enormous garden and an herbal apothecary, and it served as a meeting place and resting point for activists. We were eventually renovicted to make room for a duplex to be built where our gardens used to be.

Vancouver is steadily and purposefully squeezing out marginalized people through gentrification. Being renovicted has become a common experience for urban queers and activists. It's a cruel reality in light of the promise that "it gets better" – an assurance to young queer folks that the pain of homophobia and discrimination lessens when they grow up and move to the city. When my turn came to be squeezed out, I opted not to embark on the uphill battle to establish a new home. Instead, I moved to a place with no cellphone reception, a place where I quickly gave up my veganism and learned to use a chainsaw. In this rural place that many might write off as "the middle of nowhere," I found more connection to queer community than I had in Vancouver.

My home is called the Homestead; it's a queer and trans homesteading project that seeks to nurture a vibrant rural queer community built on social justice principles. We do this by developing our food security, sharing skills, practising radical mental health, and committing to solidarity work. We grow, raise, and process our own food (including roadkill and livestock), and we gather and make medicines that support our broader community. We find creative ways to lower our living expenses.

The Homestead is located on the unceded territory of the Sinixt people in the Slocan Valley. The valley has long been a place of relief from white supremacy, imperial militarism, and

capitalism; however, it also represents a site of settler colonialism and racism. It was a refuge for lesbian separatists, hippies, Doukhobors, and draft dodgers during the Vietnam War, but it was likewise the site of colonial displacement and Japanese internment camps. Our home is located within this contradictory history, and our work to unpack this history and our place in it is ongoing.

Last summer, we initiated a community accountability process to respond to racist and homophobic behaviour that had occurred at a nearby farm and that hurt a friend of ours. During the accountability process, queer folks gathered in our living room to discuss how to best address the oppressive language that had been directed toward our friend. We sent a letter to the farm residents and met with them for a facilitated conversation, not only about the single incident that sparked the process but also about the history of racism, homophobia, and misogyny in our area. Some people listened intently; others were defensive. In the end, our friend left the community to live in a place with more folks of colour and more consciousness around racial issues. This process highlighted that racism doesn't disappear in queer rural spaces, and that larger systems of power still influence the intersection of sexuality, race, and rurality. A big part of our ongoing accountability process is to keep re-engaging our Homestead on how to make this space, and the land we share with others, safe for all people.

Recently, I spoke with a friend of mine, a self-identified dyke-crone who has lived in the valley longer than I've been alive. She told me that the Kootenays have the largest population of queers in rural Canada. She has seen her generation, mine, and others in between flock here from the city in search of a life liberated from capitalism. My relationship with her allows me to see and feel through time. Her stories help me understand how her fight, years ago, to have the Nelson Women's Centre become inclusive of trans women is the same conversation we're having today – one about making spaces inclusive for all non-binary people. The work of the Homestead is but one wave in an ocean of queers who are working to improve our networks of resilience and mutual aid. ★



andi grace is a community-supported witch, tarot card reader, folk herbalist, poet and reproductive justice rabble-rouser. They live on unceded Sinixt territory. You can connect to their work at www.andigracewrites.com

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THROUGH COLLECTIVE BARGAINING WE GET RESULTS FOR WORKERS

- Decent wages
- Safer working conditions
- Vacation standards and statutory holidays
- Same-sex benefits
- Anti-harassment laws
- Improvements to the Canada Pension Plan and Old Age Security
- Stronger public services like education, health care, and child care

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